The Dissertation Committee for Ganiva Reyes Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

There's more to their story: Portraits about the Everyday Classroom Lives of Mexican-Origin Teen Mothers at an Alternative School

Committee:

Keffrelyn D. Brown, Supervisor

Jennifer Keys Adair

Susan Sage Heinzelman

Noah De Lissovoy

Luis Urrieta, Jr.

There's more to their story: Portraits about the Everyday Classroom Lives of Mexican-origin Teen Mothers at an Alternative School

by

Ganiva Reyes, B.A.; M.Ed.; M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2016

Dedication

For mothering students everywhere who have much to teach the world, and the teachers who learn and grow with them.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is about care, love, and support, so I want to start out with extending my deepest gratitude to my family—my Mom, Dad, Iram, Irving, and Margery, for having such patience and understanding for me throughout my graduate school career. There have been several ups and downs along my crazy roller coaster ride and regardless of the twists and turns, each one of you has been there with me. Mom, thank you for always encouraging me to strive for bigger goals. You have supported me in so many ways through your hard work and endless courage, ¡muchas gracias! Dad, thank your for understanding me and encouraging me throughout the years. Your artistic sentiments have always been an inspiration to me. ¡Los quiero mucho a los dos! I especially want to recognize Juan, my life partner, mi media naranja, and my source of inspiration. You have been there for me in every capacity imaginable, and your belief in me has helped me grow as a scholar, an intellectual, and as a person. To my friends who have also been like family—Celina, Pollo, Chris, Jackie, Rae, Sandra, Chuck, Marissa, and BoLa—thank you for your support, encouragement, and all the fun times that have kept me going! To my cousin Ruben, thank you for checking in on me and listening to me. Your support and excitement has been a great source of motivation.

I also want to thank the students and teachers who participated in this study and opened up their hearts and stories to me. Thank you for your time and energy, and for sharing your personal insights and experiences. I deeply appreciate the mothering

students for allowing me to observe their everyday life in the classroom, and I am also thankful to the teachers who welcomed me into their classrooms. The entire school faculty, staff, and administration of the school I visited were kind, accommodating, and welcoming, which warms my heart—thank you! I am indebted to you all, so I will do all I can to promote change through the knowledge you helped produce.

I am also immensely grateful to the patience, understanding, and guidance from my advisor, Dr. Keffrelyn Brown. Thank you for your expertise, feedback, and belief in me in spite of my own doubts. Your insights enabled me to engage in rigorous analysis throughout my fieldwork and writing, and your advice has propelled me forward throughout my PhD career! My committee members have also been an amazing source of guidance and feedback. Thank you Dr. Luis Urrieta for your kind words of encouragement, all of your teachings, and your enthusiasm for my work. You are the first Cultural Studies in Education professor whose class I took when I was an MA student in Women's and Gender Studies, and you inspired me to apply to the program, so thank you for that! Dr. Sue Heinzelman, thank you for your love, encouragement, and unwavering support throughout the years! You have been there for me ever since I first came to UT Austin when I was an MA student. You opened up several opportunities for me to grow not only as a scholar, but also as a professional. I am truly thankful for all of your personal and professional advice that has helped me believe in myself and not give up! Dr. Noah De Lissovoy, thank you for the theoretical rigor your have helped me accomplish and your continuous support throughout my PhD program. Your teachings have helped me develop conceptual tools that I will continue to use in my work! To Dr.

Jennifer Adair, thank you for your support and amazing feedback that enabled me to clear the woods in my mind and hone in on a study of classroom interactions. You helped me develop a clear focus that became the backbone for this study!

My time at UT Austin has certainly been a rewarding experience due to several wonderful friends and fellow emerging scholars. Blanca and Racheal, you are truly gifted women who have been an amazing source of companionship! I have learned so much from our amazing feminist conversations that always serve to reinvigorate me and remind me of why I do social justice scholarship. I also want to extend my gratitude to other compañer@s whom I've had the pleasure to learn and growth with over the years by working together and engaging in inspiring conversations—Mary, Olmo, Julia, Sue, Marianna, and Maribel.

There are several women who have been tremendous sources of motivation. Thank you Dottie for being a pillar of support, your enthusiasm for teaching and your engagement with students has taught me so much! I also want to thank Pat and Nancy from Women's and Gender Studies for their enthusiastic support and friendly chats over the years. Dr. Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez, your mentorship, kindness, and support have also been integral to my success at UT Austin. Your amazing research and commitment to social justice research, no matter how messy the context, has truly inspired me to also engage with complexities and contradictions, and to never shy away from the "elephant in the room." In addition, the work of Wanda Pillow has especially inspired me conduct research about mothering students. I am humbled and grateful for our wonderful conversation in which she shared her wisdom and experience doing urgent and much

needed work about mothering students' educational lives. Thank you for taking the time to time to speak with me—your words and insights helped me feel reinvigorated to continue this work!

There's more to their story: Portraits about the Everyday Classroom Lives of Mexican-origin Teen Mothers at an Alternative School

Ganiva Reyes, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Keffrelyn D. Brown

There's more to their story is a qualitative study that examines the pedagogical interactions of care and support that unfold between teachers and students within an alternative school located along the U.S./Mexico border. More specifically, I pay close attention to the interactions between teachers and mothering students of Mexican-origin, and how teachers and students perceive the notion of "care," over the course of one academic year in three different classrooms. Drawing from theories of care, Chicana feminist theories, and culturally relevant pedagogy, and integrating Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's portraiture methodology in my research design, I assemble portraits that zoom in on the detailed pedagogical strategies teachers use to connect with mothering students.

The main findings that emerged from the portraits are the following: (1) the academic and personal interactions of care and support that unfolded between the teachers and the mothering students contributed to the students' sense of belonging in the school, thereby enabling them to be positioned as "model" students and "good" mothers

who are “mature” and full of potential to pursue higher education (this is in contrast to their prior schooling experiences in which they were known as “bad” students or “troublemakers”); (2) the family-centric structure of the alternative school allowed for teachers to find the support they needed to provide the care necessary for mothering students to construct a pro-school ethos; (3) although interactions of care and support are exhibited, there are taken-for-granted gendered dynamics that play out in the classroom that curtail further possibility for students to redefine their identities in transformative ways; (4) in their quest to be supportive and caring to students, the teachers felt underprepared to help their students deal with complex issues like gender discrimination, sexuality, and gender violence.

This study makes visible structures we take for granted by centering the educational experiences of Latina mothering teens. This is important work not just because of what we can learn about how structures shape teachers’ ability to do care work, but it also fills in the gaps of what is known about the needs of Mexican origin youth who live along the U.S./Mexico border, and for Latina mothering students more specifically.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

A couple of days after I was given permission to work at RGV School for my research, I went by the alternative school to fill out a background check form. As I entered the main office, a crowd of what appeared to be a large family holding balloons and flowers overwhelmed me as I wondered, "what school event is taking place today?" The main office overflowed with pláticas, laughter, and watchful eyes monitoring who was going in and out of the room; it was practically stuffy. Swarms of color filled the space with bright flowers and balloons that read: "Congratulations!" While I took care of my background check form with one of the secretaries, I just had to ask if there was a school event going on. She replied, "No, this is what we do every time a student graduates!" Suddenly, a young woman emerged from the back of the office wearing a blue cap and gown. A yellow tassel hung from the right side of her cap as she smoothed out her gown. What stood out the most, however, was her beaming smile. She took her position at the front door of the main office while she ran her fingers through her hair to make sure it was in place. Her subtle little "dance-like" movements and the mild shuffling of her feet gave hints that she was a bit nervous, but her giggles and the affirmation from her family and the staff in the office kept her composed and reassured. Soon, the song "Celebrate Good Times" by Kool and the Gang flowed out of the announcement speakers and everyone from inside the classrooms emerged to line up along the hallways. It was clear that they were used to the routine. After the assistant principal gave the young woman the "go ahead," she quickly straightened up and took

her first steps out of the office where her family cheered. The staff that remained inside the office peered out into the hallway and cheered while some of them swiveled their bodies from side to side as they clapped to the rhythm of the music. The graduate with long dark and meticulously straightened hair raised her brown hand to cup her mouth as she joyfully laughed and kept walking past her cheering family. She continued walking into the hallway where the students and adults stood in a line with their backs up against the wall, waiting to congratulate her as she passed them by. A steady stream of cheers followed her along in a long hallway circling its way through the building to end up back at the front entrance of the school. The young woman followed the path back to the starting point where her family waited to hand her the abundance of balloons and flowers. She struggled to hold on to the gifts as her family members, and perhaps, also friends, went up to her for hugs and the occasional kiss on the cheek. From where I stood, verbal glimpses of "Felicidades" and "Congratulations" reached my ear, and while everyone else seemed to know exactly what to do, all I could do was stand and watch in awe thinking, "Imagine if all schools did this for their students?"

This portrait offers a counter-story about one Mexican-origin student, her large family, and a school that celebrated her accomplishment, or what many others take for granted—a high school diploma. The setting in the portrait is RGV School, an alternative school for disenfranchised students located along the U.S./Mexico border in a small town in the lower Rio Grande Valley (RGV for short). Stories like this, about Mexican-origin folks along the U.S./Mexico border, are rarely heard; instead the general public tends to hear a lot about the border violence, drug cartels, labor exploitation, poverty, and the lack

of educational attainment that plagues the region. While all this does happen, the border is much more than these portrayals; this region is full of people with much creativity, resources, ways of knowing, and improvisation that enables sobrevivencia (Galvan, 2006; Villenas, 2005) despite the sometimes hostile climate. The local youth are part of this imaginative and resilient population, and although they tend to have a low educational attainment (Mier et al. 2004), there are teachers and institutions, like RGV School, that are working against the odds to offer specialized forms of support to disenfranchised students, including Latina teen mothers (or who I often refer to as Latina mothering students)—the focal topic of this study. I don't know if the graduating student presented in the introductory portrait was a teen mother or not, but I do know that she along with the rest of the students at RGV School, many of whom *are* teen parents, can count on their graduation to be celebrated as a community, and family and friends are invited. Community and belonging is what I witnessed that day at RGV School, and not just for the students, but also parents and other members of the family.

At a larger social scale, however, mothering students are seldom immersed in supportive environments and discourses. More often than not, we hear negative statistics, stories, and the general doom and gloom of teen mothers' "dead end" realities. Problems like the lack of educational attainment, poverty, welfare, and even poor parenting radiate from the literature about young mothers, especially for Latina mothering teens. The gendered discourse preaches that teen mothers of color are "welfare" queens (Kaplan, 1997). More specifically, along with this chorus is the message that Latina mothers, whether they're adolescents or not, don't care about getting an education. In this shadow

of deficit thinking (Valencia, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999), it is rare to hear positive or at least humanizing stories about Latina teen mothers.

This study is about the everyday classroom experiences of teen mothers and three classroom teachers at RGV School. Based on a year's worth of classroom observations and in-depth interviews with three classroom teachers and five mothering students, I assemble portraits about the pedagogical interactions and relationships that unfold between three teachers and mothering students. Following the example of Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), I am looking for "goodness" in everyday classroom lives of teen parents and the teachers who work with them. For this study, I ask the following two research questions about Latina teen mothers and their teachers at RGV School: *1) What are the pedagogical interactions and relationships that unfold between teachers and Latina mothering students in the classroom setting of an alternative high school that houses a teen parenting program? 2) How do the Latina mothering students experience and make sense of the classroom pedagogical interactions and relationships with their teachers?*

Through the method of portraiture, I intend to not only carry out my inquiry, but also create counterstories that provides a wider spectrum of color and shade to the over-simplistic and negatively inclined literature about teen mothers that dominates education scholarship and policy making. Establishing the humanity of Latina teen mothers and their teachers is a first step to not only meet the educational needs of Latina teen mothers, but also offer new possibilities for education reform as a whole. However, it is important to highlight that while I seek to create portraits that work against the over-simplified tales

of teen parenting gloom, I do not mean to romanticize their experiences. Like any other space, there are contradictions, vulnerabilities, and weaknesses that imbue the classroom pedagogical relationships between the teachers and mothering students at RGV School. Instead, my methodological approach of asking "what is good here" (Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) is a strategic move to disrupt a social stigma about Latina teen mothers, to provide a humanizing account that can bring forth educational resources and support for these young women *and* the educators who work with them.

URGENCY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF WORK

When the lives of Latina teen mothers are studied, they are often portrayed as a social welfare issue rather than an educational concern (Burdell, 1995, 1998; Kelly, 1996), or deficit frameworks take over and dismiss Latina teen mothers through discourses of individual blame and moral downfall within their communities. For instance, in the year 2000, "Reyn" Archer, a Texas State Health Commissioner, blamed ''the sky high teen pregnancy rate in Texas on the fact that Hispanics lack the cultural belief 'that getting pregnant is a bad thing'" (Méndez-Negrete, Saldaña, & Vega, 2006, p. 95). In 1998, Julian Stanely, a former president of the American Education Research Association (AERA) made the following recommendation in the *Educational Researcher*: 'This [teenage pregnancy] is a national emergency…I propose that teenage girls be encouraged to use long-term, maintenance-free contraceptives such as Norplant, IUDs, or Depo-Provera and they be paid regularly to continue doing so up to the age of 20 or so' (Pillow, 2004, p. 79). In regards to contraceptives like Norplant and Depo-Provera, Latina women are especially pushed to use such contraceptives by sex educators

and medical professionals due to the stereotyped hyperfertility of Latina women combined with the assumption that Latino men are too "macho" to use condoms (Garcia, 2009; Gutierrez, 2008). To make matters worse, the long-term effects of such contraceptives on women under the age of seventeen are not known. Yet, even in the midst of these public and scholarly discourses, education scholar Wanda Pillow (2006; 2004) has shown that there are very few scholarship and policy initiatives in the education field to address the educational needs of teen mothers, especially Latina teen mothers.

Nevertheless, there is emerging work about their renewed interest in education after they become mothers. Contrary to popular belief, in addition to Pillow, scholars such Smithbattle (2007) and Zachry (2005) posit that teen mothers do not necessarily drop out of school because they became pregnant; most of these young women were already disenfranchised from schooling before they became pregnant, either due to class and racial discrimination, underfunding of schools, standardized testing, or other challenges. Many women decide to stay in school during their pregnancy, or come back to school after they become mothers (Brubaker & Wright, 2006; Kirkman, Harrison, Hillier, & Pyett, 2001; Pillow, 2004). However, a key factor that helps mothers maintain their motivation and have the tools to continue schooling is the care and support teachers provide (Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008; Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Klaw, Rhodes, & Fitzgerald, 2003; Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992; SmithBattle, 2007; Zachry, 2005). Hence, there is a call for education scholars to learn more about what kind of teaching practices of care and support work for teen mothers. While there is very little research on what works for

teen mothers, there is a rich body of literature in education regarding theories of care from scholars like Nel Noddings (2001, 2013) and Angela Valenzuela (1999), and social justice education that emphasizes culturally relevant teaching and critical pedagogy from renowned scholars like Gloria Ladson Billings (2009). This body of work addresses the needs of historically disenfranchised youth, yet the experience of teen mothers, as a specifically marginalized group, is absent in the literature.

On the one hand, the literature discussed above recommends that Latina teen mothers need care and support from their teachers in order to continue their education. On the other hand, theories of care and social justice oriented teaching practices stress that it is crucial to address the needs of historically marginalized youth in culturally relevant and responsive ways. However, none of these works have addressed the central question of how theories of care and social justice oriented teaching practices work for teen mothers (as a specific disadvantaged group of students) to provide the support they need to complete their education. Precisely, what kind of care and support do Latina teen mothers need from their teachers as they seek to further their education? This gap is problematic because teen mothers are an incredibly disenfranchised group who can benefit from education, yet very little is known about their educational lives, let alone how to provide them with what they need to complete their education. They are mostly seen as a social welfare issue, rather than an educational concern. If social justice oriented education research stresses the importance of addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, why are the needs of Latina teen mothers overlooked? In addition, research about the educational lives of teen mothers is urgent because it not

only maps out this population as worthy subjects for investment in their education; it also makes visible the ways in which gender and sexuality are integral factors that shape the educational lives and trajectory of culturally and linguistically diverse students (a larger group in which Latina teen mothers are found).

By using portraiture methodology and feminist theories, I situate Latina teen mothers as worthy of educational investment. I assembled portraits about the pedagogical interactions of care and support that unfold between Latina teen mothers and their teachers in three classrooms within an alternative school, RGV School. These interactions, made possible within a small family-oriented school, enabled the teachers to recognize that the teen mothers of Mexican origin were facing hardships that are gendered. This is in stark contrast to how they are often seen as "the problem" and blamed for their pregnancy because of common stereotypes of Latina youth sexuality that teachers often espouse. Understanding that Latina youth face hardships that are not necessarily their individual fault also allows the teachers to develop compassion and new pedagogies of care that help them identify other issues faced by the students, such as dating violence. These are issues that need to be understood as part of the diverse experiences of students, but a lens that focuses exclusively on race and ethnicity would miss this. Thus, my research is urgent because it would expand the scope of cultural diversity, culturally relevant teaching, and social justice oriented teaching, by including analyses of gender and sexuality in the lives of students. At the same time, I am taking care to develop a sophisticated framework that would avoid the traps of deficit thinking. For instance, gender violence is not exclusive to communities of Mexican origin, but

analyzing these issues should show a local manifestation of a cross-cultural problem. What has enabled me to understand the gendered landscape of schooling and teaching is a focus on the lives of Mexican working class mothering students, and these lessons can be expanded to understanding how cultural diversity is gendered. It has implications not just for teen mothers and Latina students, but also the lives of other students who face particular gendered challenges in education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LAYERS OF ANALYSIS

For this study, there are two main research questions that I address: *(1) What are the pedagogical interactions and relationships that unfold between teachers and Latina mothering students in the classroom setting of an alternative high school that houses a teen parenting program? (2) How do the Latina mothering students experience and make sense of the classroom pedagogical interactions and relationships with their teachers?* Within the first research question, there are three major layers of analysis that I will unpack throughout this dissertation. The first layer of analysis focuses on the pedagogical interactions that unfolded between the teachers and the mothering students, so I seek to understand what teaching strategies, styles, and approaches were exhibited by the teachers in the classroom with their students. With this layer of analysis I draw from Black feminist theory, especially in regards to othermothering (Collins, 1998, 1991; hooks, 2000), in order to make sense of how the teachers practiced pedagogies of care and support. The second layer of analysis that I engaged with, in relation to the first research question, is how the classroom structure impacted the ways in which teachers and students interacted, and how the contours of the teachers' pedagogical strategies were

shaped by how the teachers organized their classroom space for the students. Along the same thread, the third layer of analysis takes into account how the caring structure and culture of the alternative school fostered pedagogies of care from the teachers in their classrooms. In order to make sense of how institutional and structural factors (from the alternative school and the particular classroom contexts) impacted pedagogical practices I turned to Bourdieu's theory of the logics of practice (Bourdieu, 1990, 2001). Through this theory, I unpack the interplay between: (1) the individual and collective habitus of the teachers and mothering students, (2) the institutional framework in which these individuals are situated, and (3) the (pedagogical) practices that emerge as a result of the individual and structural nexus formerly mentioned. In doing this, I make visible what teachers need in order to practice care and support for their students in sustainable ways that must be supported and recognized by the alternative school.

With regards to the second research question, there are two layers that I also unpack throughout this dissertation. The first layer of analysis focuses on the students' interpretations of their interactions and relationships with their teachers. For this, I also turn to othermothering from Black feminist theory (Collins, 1998, 1991; hooks, 2000) in order to make sense of how the mothering students understood their teachers as caring and supportive. They not only saw their teachers as educators in the formal schooling sense, but also as their mentors, advisors, and resource for navigating their unique obstacles as teen mothers. Regarding the second layer of analysis that I engaged in for the second research question, Bourdieuian theory helped me make sense of how the mothering students interpreted their teachers' actions and practices through a school

culture that positioned the educators as part of a support network. As I will show later, the students often talked about their teachers' capacity to be caring in light of the school in which they worked. Thus, like the first research question, I bring structure into the picture. For the second research question, though, I do this in order to make sense of the students' interpretations of their classroom experiences with their teachers.

The multiple layers of analysis involved with addressing my research questions for this study, however, are far from neat and are by no means straight forward. Instead, several contradictions and complexities emerged throughout my fieldwork and data analysis and I will discuss these in the later chapters. In order to make sense of these contradictions, I turned to Chicana feminist theory (Anzaldúa, 2007; Medina, 2010; Perez, 1998; Emma Pérez & Perez, 1999), especially in regards to nepantla and sitios y lenguas, in order to unravel the multiple discourses, interpretations, structures, and positionalities that the teachers and students invoked in their classroom interactions. Through this theoretical lens, in this dissertation, I point out the overlapping social and cultural forces that coalesced in the classrooms to create teacher-student interactions that were caring and supportive, yet also imbued with gendered dynamics of power that curtailed further development of care in transformative ways, such as disrupting gender norms. In order to make sense of how gender norms influenced pedagogical interactions in the classroom, I turned to R.W. Connell's theory of gender as an "organizing principle" (Connell, 1987, 2005). However, Bourdieuian theory once again was a helpful tool to explain gender norms that seeped into the classroom due to a school culture that endorses care without a critical gender lens. By making heteronormativity visible through

the interplay of habitus, practice, and structure at RGV School, throughout this dissertation I point out how the lack of a gendered critical lens by the school, teachers, and *students* created pedagogical limitations within a caring and community oriented institution. Yet Chicana feminist theory positions these limitations as windows of opportunity for transformative growth that I will discuss in the later chapters, particularly in the conclusion.

LAYING OUT THE GROUNDWORK: KEY TERMS, TEACHER POSITIONALITES, AND THE STUDENT POPULATION

For clarification purposes, there are some key terms that I will briefly define. First of all in regards to my participants in this study, I utilize the terms Latina mothering students, Latina teen mothers, and sometimes mothering students of Mexican-origin to refer to the young women in my study who both were students and mothers at RGV School during observations. I utilize the term "mothering student" in order to emphasize the multiple identities and responsibilities the young women navigate and enact as a result of their dual-identity as student and primary care-takers of their child. The term also focuses on their action of mothering, as well as their agency, rather than labeling them as "teen mother," which is a label that often carries social stigma in mainstream social and political discourses. However, I sometimes refer to these young women and students as teen mothers in light of the obstacles they often face due to social factors and conditions that are hostile to their roles as mothers at a young age. In regards to their race and ethnicity, my young participants are of Mexican-origin. However, I often refer to them as Latinas in order to conceptualize their experiences within a larger demographic

that is understudied and in need of attention, especially in regards to education policy. Nevertheless, the fact that their classroom experiences are located along the U.S./Mexico border allows for contextual particularities that begin to add diversity to the Latina/o experience of youth in the United States. In the portraits I pieced together for this dissertation, the borderlands map out the foundation, contours, and possibilities of the classroom spaces and interactions I describe and analyze. In Chapter three, I go further into the background stories and positionalities of the students by presenting portraits for each mothering student I interviewed.

The teachers and their backgrounds

In regards to the teachers, I refer to them by their last name (pseudonym) to emphasize their positionality and roles as educators, (and as some of the students refer to them) advisors and mentors. Also, each teacher's positionality differed due to her race, language, and citizenship status. Mrs. Santos, the teen parenting class instructor and program coordinator, is a U.S. born woman of Mexican–origin and from a working class background who often code-switched between English and Spanish like most of the students (and the rest of the general population) often do in the borderlands. Her demeanor and mannerisms closely resembled those of her students, as she not only code-switched, but she also used hand gestures, body language, and expressions that were unique to the border culture of the Rio Grande Valley. Ms. Luna, on the other hand, was the science teacher, and is a Mexican citizen from Matamoros, Tamaulipas (a city located right across the U.S./Mexico border from Brownsville, a town that is also located in the Rio Grande Valley like the small town in which this study was done). Ms. Luna had

permission to work at RGV School through a work visa that she was renewing during my fieldwork (which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4). Although she spoke Spanish, she seldom code-switched and she mostly spoke English with the students, with a distinct northern Mexican accent. She sometimes mispronounced words in English, and she struggled with piecing together her sentences, which reflected some of her students' difficulties with also speaking English. Although she hardly spoke Spanish at school and she refrained from talking about her personal life (as I will further discuss in Chapter 4), the students picked up on her accent and pronunciation to figure out that she was from Matamoros. Mrs. Richardson, the English Language Arts teacher, is a white woman who is not originally from the U.S./Mexico border region. Before she began working at RGV School, she was working in a small town north in central Texas. She primarily spoke English in the classroom and she often used words and expressions many students did not understand like "anthropological stance" and "jovial," but she also frequently utilized dichos (or regional expressions) and words like "Chihuahuas." Mrs. Richardson liked to learn about the border culture as much as possible so that she could implement it in her classes with her students.

RGV School as an Alternative School

RGV School is an alternative school that serves students who have fallen behind in their prior school with regards to credits due to attendance, discipline issues, and other extenuating circumstances. As an alternative school, RGV School is positioned as a "school of choice" or an option for students who need extra support and attention from teachers in a smaller school environment in which they may receive specialized and

individualized instruction. This schooling format attracts students who are non-mothering and mothering students, as well as students from any gender. Hence, two of the classrooms that I observed had mothering students and non-parenting students who were male and female. The classroom pedagogical interactions that I discuss in the upcoming chapters included non-mothering and male students, which further enabled me to pick up on gendered dynamics of power that were exhibited in the classroom, as well as how the mothering students were positioned in relation to the rest of their peers. However, my focal point in the portraits and my analysis throughout Chapters 4, 5, and 6 remained on the mothering students that were in the classrooms that I observed.

All the mothering students, and most of the students at RGV School, attended what I refer to as "traditional" high schools or middle schools, before they applied and transferred to RGV School. I refer to these schools as traditional schools because they are not alternative schools, and instead are structured like the average high school and middle school in the United States. I also refer to these schools as "home schools" throughout this dissertation because they are the institutions that the students are zoned for based on where they live in town.

SYNOPSIS OF EACH CHAPTER

This dissertation is divided up into seven chapters, including this Introduction chapter in which I have laid out the significance and urgency of a study about the educational lives of Latina mothering students. I have also framed the contributions of this study to larger scholarly discussions about culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies and how to meet the needs of historically marginalized youth, including teen

mothers who are often left out of the discussion. In this first chapter I also introduce the theories that frame the different layers of analysis that I present in this dissertation in response to my research questions. Finally, I laid the groundwork for this study by providing defining key terms and providing further context by briefly introducing the teachers whose classrooms I observed.

In Chapter 2, I present the literature that is relevant to three main topic areas that are pertinent to this study. The first main topic area for which I present literature is what is known about the educational lives and experiences of Latina youth, and Latina mothering students more specifically (before and after they become teen mothers). The second topic area is about the kinds of pedagogies that teachers often employ in order to provide care and support to historically marginalized youth, including culturally relevant teaching, pedagogies of care, and othermothering. In the last topic area of the literature review I present what is known about alternative schooling structures that promote a culture of care. In this section, I also point out how the structure and culture of certain alternative schools enable teachers to practice care and support with their students in ways that are sanctioned and recognized. I wrap up this chapter by presenting key theoretical frameworks that guide the analysis of my findings for this study. I divide my theoretical frameworks into two parts: gender theory, and Bourdieu's theory of the logics of practice.

Chapter 3 unpacks the methodology that I employ in order to shape the methods, data analysis, and research approach to this study. I discuss the purpose behind why I chose portraiture methodology (Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) in order to

present my findings. I also include a discussion about extending the metaphor of creating portraits by using a jazz analogy (Dixson, Chapman, & Hill, 2005) that enabled me to think about how to write portraits that hone in on the inter*actions* between teachers and students in the classroom. This chapter also includes a statement of my researcher positionality in relation to the location of my study and the participants that I worked with on a daily basis. I also include a detailed discussion of my data analysis process, including how I coded the data and created themes as an ongoing process as I gathered new data (Charmaz, 2006). Throughout my on-going process of data analysis, I revised interview protocols to further investigate new leads and check the validity and trustworthiness of my data. I end this chapter with portraits of the five mothering students I interviewed in order to get their insights, thoughts, and reflections about their classes, their teachers, and their general experiences at RGV School.

Chapter 4 is the first data chapter that focuses on the pedagogical interactions and relationships that unfolded in Mrs. Santos' teen parenting classroom. I present portraits of key lessons and activities that best exemplify the nuances, complexities, and contradictions of her pedagogical practices with the teen mothers. The students that were in Mrs. Santos' class during my study were female, and most of them were also mothering students. Some main findings that emerged were how her interactions with her students revolved around personal connection, intimacy, and personal disclosures that added meaning to her lessons. Her pedagogical practices also reflected the culture of care and support that existed at RGV School in ways that enabled her to remain enthusiastic about fulfilling the needs of her students, even though she often felt overwhelmed and

exhausted in the process. I discuss how teachers also need care and support from faculty, staff, and administrators in order to sustain their care work for their students.

In chapter 5, I unpack the contradictions and complexities behind Ms. Luna's pedagogical interactions and relationships with her students in her Biology and 8th grade science classrooms. I explore how the fast-paced curriculum she works with created a sense of urgency and a "no non-sense" approach with her students that superficially comes off as aesthetically caring (Noddings, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999), but is actually coming from an inner core of authentic care. Ms. Luna cared deeply for her students' well being and always considered their personal lives and hardships as she thought about ways to extend deadlines and modify the high-paced curriculum. However, her strategies often foreclosed opportunities for her students to pursue their own interests and curiosity. Instead, Ms. Luna was preoccupied with her students not falling behind in class and turning in their assignments so that they could earn their science credits and graduate. This general structure and pedagogical strategies worked well with the mothering students, who also had a sense of urgency to graduate as soon as possible. In this chapter I also talk about gendered power dynamics and the ways in which Ms. Luna positioned the teen mothers in particular ways compared to their non-mothering and male peers.

In Chapter 6, Mrs. Richardon's pedagogical interactions and relationships with her students, including the Latina mothering students, differed greatly from the other two teachers. This is because her class was structured around self-paced modules in which each student worked independently on their own set of assignments and projects. The students were working on one or more of three credits: ELA, Theatre, or Speech. This

self-paced module structure opened up several opportunities for Mrs. Richardson to provide individualized instruction to her students, but like Ms. Luna, her interactions with her students often occurred in gendered ways. Her time and attention was usually allocated to the male students in the class even though she often expressed explicit interest and concern for her female students, especially the mothering students. She also utilized culturally relevant strategies to peak students' interest in class, however, her pedagogical strategies were often impersonal as she often refrained from sharing too much about her own life with her students. Still, Mrs. Richardson was often well informed about the personal matters of her students, and she responded to her students' needs in her class by providing accommodations (like modifying their assignments, allowing them to rest and put their heads down if they worked late or stayed up late with their babies, etc.).

Chapter 7 is the final chapter and conclusion of this dissertation. In this chapter, I wrap up the key findings from the data chapters (4-6) to point out overarching themes that speak back to the literature that I outlined in Chapter 2. I also discuss how my theoretical framework made certain gendered patterns visible in the interactions I observed. Limitations and implications of this study are also presented; including a discussion of what the classroom experiences of Latina mothering students in alternative school classrooms contributes to what we know about culturally responsive pedagogies and ethics of care in education.

I want to end this introduction with a note about the portraits that I present in each data chapter (4-6). In each data chapter I focus on one of three teachers whom I observed

at great length, and I present portraits about particular, lessons, activities, and interactions that exemplify key points that I analyze in between portraits. In other words, the portraits were pieced together through in-depth analysis, however more explicit unpacking of my analysis is done in between the portraits in order to make certain themes clear to the reader. Hence, the data chapters alternate with portraits and sections of analysis (with relevant literature). In regards to formatting, in order to keep the flow of the narrative style in the portraits intact, I utilize footnotes to provide further context and explanation for certain statements I make in the portraits. That said, I will now proceed to the next chapter in which I review relevant literature for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

This study has multiple levels of analysis that revolve around the interactions between pregnant and mothering Latina students whose identities carry historical and cultural weight, and their teachers, whose training may or may not have prepared them to serve a population of students marginalized by mainstream schools, especially along the axis of gender as it intersects with race, class, and sexuality. These interactions happen within an alternative school structure (one described by school officials as "family-oriented") that is worth noting, mainly because any flexibility and genuine care from teachers towards their students has to be facilitated by a school structure that supports teacher cooperation and unconventional methods of help. For example, there are no late bell rings, baby car seats to improve attendance are a priority for learning like books would be, and the school fosters a network of support among teachers that goes beyond sharing lesson planning. Therefore, the relevant literature for this study is divided among three main subjects: (1) what is known about Latina mothering and pregnant students in education? (2) How are teachers trained to work with historically marginalized students who face unique obstacles like teen mothers? (3) What is the structure and purpose of alternative schools in the U.S.?

THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF LATINA TEEN MOTHERS

There are many gaps in the literature that addresses teen mothers and education, especially concerning Latina teen mothers, whose complex lives are often reduced to statistical data and dominant, often racist, narratives of moral deficiency. Decades of

empirical research in the social sciences, including education research, has produced evidence of an array of negative outcomes for young parents and their children as a result of early childbearing (Furstenberg, 1987; P. A. Wright & Davis, 2008). These studies illustrate teen parenting as an obstacle for education, as young mothers are less likely to finish high school and more likely to earn lower incomes than their non-mothering peers (Furstenberg, 1987). However, there is very little literature that directly engages with the educational experiences of teen parents because, as some scholars have noted, it is rarely situated as an educational concern by education researchers and policy makers at large (Kaplan, 1997; Kelly, 2000, 2003; Pillow, 2004; Pillow, 2006). More specifically, there is even less literature about the educational lives of Latino/a parenting teens; most studies about "teen parents" usually include the combination of Black and Latina/o young parents, as well as low-income teen parents. In light of the limited scope of scholarship that centers the educational lives of Latina mothering teens, in the first section of this literature review I will bring to the forefront how teen pregnancy has been situated as a social-welfare issue rather than an educational concern. Moreover, teen pregnancy among Latina/o populations is often filtered through a racialized/gendered lens that positions young women of color as innately hypersexual, irresponsible, and undeserving of educational opportunities (Pillow 2004; Kaplan 1997). In spite of this negative climate, I then highlight a small emerging conversation in the literature that focuses on the renewed sense of motivation to continue schooling among many Latina mothering students. I juxtapose this renewed motivation and the socio-political and historical trajectory of teen pregnancy in the U.S. to show that educators are missing opportunities to support the

emerging educational aspirations of Latina mothering students. Mapping teen pregnancy as an educational issue opens up new avenues for providing the resources, accommodations, and (as this study will address) responsive classroom pedagogies Latina teen mothers need to continue their education and secure a better quality of life.

The national backdrop of teen pregnancy among Latina/o youth

Within the large, mainstream socio-political milieu, teen mothers have been a hot topic of discussion loaded with social class stigma, racial stereotypes like the "welfare queen" (Hancock, 2003, 2004; Harris-Perry, 2011; Kaplan, 1997; Kelly, 2007), social anxieties about traditional family values and gender norms (Sidel, 2006), and constructions of teen pregnancy as an "epidemic" when it really is not (Kelly, 2000; Pillow, 2006). Moreover, research in fields like psychology (Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Belsky, & Silva, 2001), social work (McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994), and even medicine (Jutte et al., 2010) have emphasized negative outcomes associated with teen pregnancy, including low educational attainment of teen mothers and their children (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008). Although the teen birth rate in the United States has been declining since the 1970's, Latina/os, in particular, have come under the national spotlight in regards to high teen birth rates (Martin et al., 2009; Trejos-Castillo & Frederick, 2011; Pillow, 2004). Latina teen mothers are especially enveloped in negative discourses of hyperfertility because of xenophobic and political fears often termed the "browning of America" by alarmist media (Chavez, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2008; Smith Silva, 2011).

Teen pregnancy, however, was once situated as a "*white* teen problem" in the 1970's (Pillow, 2004). Under the rhetoric of the "girl next door," through which young white women were constructed as innocent girls who made a mistake, opening access to an education for white middle-class young women became a social priority. As a result, Title IX was utilized to provide educational accommodations and opportunities for white middle-class teen mothers. However, the same was not done for Black and Latina teen mothers, because unlike their white middle-class counterparts, their sexuality was seen as innately deviant (Pillow, 2004). As the teen pregnancy rate went down among white middle-class youth, the pregnancy rate among young Black and Latina women stayed the same, which shifted discourse on teen pregnancy to a culturally deficit and an individually moral problem of black and brown women (Phoenix, 1993; Simms, 1993).

The social concern that was once expressed in the public domain transformed into a private matter on individual accountability; so schools that get involved with teen mothers and offer helpful programs are now commonly believed to "overstep the boundaries of education," and give the perception that such schools "are 'soft' on pregnancy" (Pillow, 2004, p. 82). As a result, little has been done to design and study current educational programs for teen parents. Instead, the 1996 Welfare Reform Act constituted a shift from treating mothers as 'entitled subjects' to "punishing them through social welfare regulation" (Pillow, 2004, p. 218). This shift has been a deeply racialized one in which educational access and opportunity is now differentially allocated along the lines of race. The same dynamic continues to this day as parents of color receive minimal educational services. For teen mothers specifically, programs have been developed under

racialized discourses that aim to control their attitudes, morals, and values and train them to fit into a low-wage economy (Pillow, 2004; Kelly, 2000). For instance, after the welfare reform of 1996 (Collins & Mayer, 2010), "teen mothers have fewer opportunities to pursue formal education—often the best route to self-sufficiency" (Byrd, 2011, p. 141). Under the new "reform," single mothers have to work longer hours to 'earn' the right to cash assistance, even when they have young children; they also have their privacy invaded through increased surveillance, and are sometimes punished for infractions of rules (Byrd, 2011, p. 141; Collins & Mayer, 2010). Given the inadequacies of U.S. government aid, Latina teen mothers, are dealing with limited public services and support that help provide access to an education.

Although Latina teen mothers do not receive the adequate aid necessary to facilitate educational access and make their way out of poverty, teen pregnancy, nonetheless, remains situated as a psychological, health, or social welfare issue rather than an education policy issue (Pillow, 2004; Kaplan, 1997). Despite the attention teen pregnancy receives at the national level, education research is scarce and school data on teen mothers is either absent or out of date. In fact, many school districts have not and do not currently collect data that specifically tracks pregnant or parenting teens (Pillow, 2004). Rather than ignoring teen parents in the education arena or continuing the steady stream of negative statistics regarding the poor educational attainment of teen mothers in the social sciences, studies that detail the educational experiences of teen parents of Mexican-origin are urgently needed to understand the needs of students and teachers who serve them.

Teen pregnancy reconstructed as a 'site of transformation'

In spite of the unique hardships adolescent mothers face and the lack of educational opportunities available to them, there are nonetheless mothering teens who go back to school as a result of their early parenthood (Johnson, 2009; SmithBattle, 2007). However, contrary to the popular belief that early pregnancy itself is the factor that causes teen parents to drop out of school, most parenting teens thought about dropping out or had already dropped out of school prior to their pregnancy (Dearden, Hale, & Alvarez, 1992; Pillow, 2004; Thornberry, Smith, & Howard, 1997; Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2001). For instance, up to 60 percent of young women who become teen mothers drop out of school before pregnancy, and there is evidence that up to 25 percent of female dropouts return to school when they are pregnant (Pillow, 2004, p. 117). Hence, many young parents of color were already disenfranchised from school before they became pregnant. Several studies have shown that the antecedents of teen pregnancy encompass school factors such as high stakes testing, tracking, teacher quality, language barriers, and home-school culture incompatibility among others (Glikman, 2004; Paschal, Lewis-Moss, & Hsiao, 2011; Thornberry, Smith, & Howard, 1997; Torres & Fergus, 2012; Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2001). Scholars also agree that rigid school policies, negative experiences in schools, alienation, lack of student disengagement, disorganization of schools, and perceptions that teachers don't care about students (SmithBattle, 2007; Zachry, 2005) contribute to young women leaving school early, whether before of after pregnancy. Hence, many teen parents were facing low educational aspirations before pregnancy due to minimal involvement in schools that were more than

likely ill equipped to meet the needs of students. Rather than teen pregnancy being the problem that leads to school dropout, student's attitudes and prior experience toward schooling are the main factors that shape their lack of educational commitment (Zachry, 2005).

As a result of early parenthood, however, many parenting students undergo a "turning point experience" (SmithBattle, 2007) in which they attain a renewed sense of motivation for academic achievement. Parenting compels young women to transform the meaning of education in their lives. Johnson (2009) asserts that motherhood "serves as a site of transformation" in which teen mothers "chart a more positive life course and fashion a new identity as mother…which entails personal improvement…as young women establish new goals and purposes" (p. 257). This critical point in the lives of parenting teens, however, must be followed by 'positive chain reactions' that can reduce the effects of prior adversity (SmithBattle, 2007). Hence, the reality that some teen parents are returning to school *after* their early pregnancy signifies an opportunity for educators to capitalize on this renewed educational commitment, and provide the kind of support that is most relevant and urgent. It is only when school structures and teachers' pedagogy also change that teen mothers' renewed interest in education can be effectively harnessed. Situating teen mothering as an educational concern shifts the lens from a focus on the personal responsibility of students (who are looked down on and blamed for not fitting in to an unresponsive school system), to a social or community issue that must be met through collaboration, care, and collective accountability.

As mentioned above, mothering students have been shown to disengage from school prior to becoming parents. To dispel the myth that pregnancy is a direct source of disengagement from school, in the next section I will briefly present literature that shows why Latino youth, more specifically youth of Mexican origin, tend to disengage from school. Furthermore, the ways in which Latino youth are disengaged from school is a gendered process, so I will also briefly outline the ways in which a large portion of Latina youth are marginalized and disenfranchised in traditional schooling. I map out these experiences in order to show how motherhood offers another kind of socio-cultural avenue that enables Latina adolescents to re-configure their educational outlook, and consequently their attitudes towards schooling.

Latina/o youth in schools

A large part of the historical trajectory and legacy of U.S. schooling for student populations of Mexican origin has been one of exclusion through racist practices, such as school segregation, cultural marginalization, and linguistic elimination (Young, 2010). Mexican youth in Texas, for example, often attend schools that are poorly funded, overcrowded, English-only, and highly segregated (Valenzuela, 1999). Moreover, Mexican students and their families are typically not validated and instead are perceived in "deficit ways" (Valencia, 2002) by school administration, teachers, and counselors. For instance, parents and students of Mexican origin are often accused of not caring about getting an education, so they are positioned as culturally and morally deficient vis-à-vis a white, middle-class norm. Rather than interpreting their developing bilingual skills as an asset, recently immigrated parents and students are especially mistreated due

to their perceived "deficiency" in English (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Through this deficit lens, instead of validating, recognizing, and using the knowledge base and skills that Mexican-origin students already posses as advantages that could enrich their lives and the lives of others in schools, educators tend to devalue Mexican-origin students, resulting in what Valenzuela (1999) calls "subtractive schooling". This common schooling approach "divest[s] youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure" (p. 3).

Not only are the assets and sources of knowledge from Mexican American students devalued, but they are also stripped away to instill the knowledge, behaviors, and practices that are sanctioned by white middle class values (Valenzuela, 1999). The evidence of how students of color are pushed to drop values and knowledge from home (for example, knowledge of Spanish) has allowed researchers to more clearly see how schools are structured around white and middle-class values and culture. Therefore, although schools (and all institutions) are assumed to be "cultureless," they in fact operate with cultural assumptions based on white and middle-class experiences and values. Against this "standard," students of color who approach school with a different set of values have a disadvantage and are blamed individually for not being responsible and not wanting to do well. Latina/o scholars in education have worked to challenge and subvert the deficit thinking regarding Latina/o students, their families and communities. Critical race scholars in particular have pointed out the systemic, institutional, curricular, and pedagogical ways in which Mexican youth are marginalized and simultaneously blamed for their shortcomings (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal,

2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009; Yosso, 2002a, 2002b, 2005). These scholars use critical race theory (CRT) to center the experiences, stories, and ways of knowing of racial minority youth and reveal curricular structures, processes, and discourses that severely disadvantage students of color. Yosso (2002b) has pointed out that school curriculum broadly conceived, including the content of classes and books, filters through a Eurocentric lens that promotes the normalization of white, middle-class ways of viewing the world. Discourses like deficit thinking and traditional curricular discourses distort, stereotype, and omit students of color and rationalize discriminatory processes that reinforce structures of racial, gender, and class inequality in schools (Yosso, 2000a, 2000b). For instance, one curricular unit in a history textbook may be dedicated to Mexican Americans, but this history is told from a Eurocentric perspective of how whites encountered the "other," which re-centers the discussion back to the white middle-class 'standard' of knowing (Yosso, 2000a; Delgado-Bernal, 2002).

Hence, mainstream schooling has also been referred to as "whitestream schooling" (Urrieta, 2009) because it is structured around the knowledge base, practices, culture, and behavioral norms of the white middle class. Ochoa (2011) cites sociologist Stacey Lee to state that 'whiteness defines what is normal, desirable, and good at school' (p. 108). Further, the "criteria used to determine 'good students' include high grades, top performance on standardized tests, friendliness to teachers, and participation in prestigious school activities such as band, varsity sports, and leadership" (Ochoa, 2011, p. 108). All of this is assumed to be achieved through individual effort alone, not collaboration, while at the same time the many advantages that privileges such as

whiteness and social class can afford students are invisibilized. Students who do not fit into this norm or ideal are rendered outside the purview of "good students" and may consequently have difficulty fitting in school in ways that are socially and academically sanctioned.

Despite this discrimination, Latino students find ways to not just be recipients of knowledge that does not center them, but to become producers of knowledge. Critical race scholars (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009; Yosso, 2002a, 2002b, 2005) have critiqued overly deterministic social and cultural reproduction theories and traditional resistance theories in the social sciences as a means to bring to the forefront human agency and resistance that is not always self-defeating. This is done to explain why certain students are "difficult" to work with, and to have explanations to students' misbehavior other than blaming it on their personal responsibility (or lack of), and malicious intent. In other words, students may "act up" in school not because they want to be evil, or because they are lazy, but rather as a way to resist oppressive structures, pedagogies, and judgments from teachers who do not understand them. It is also stressed that resistance can be subtle as much as it is often overt, and it can also be internal or external; students can resist oppressive schooling systems in different ways that tend to be overlooked and unacknowledged. For instance, Delgado-Bernal (2002) has used a Chicana feminist perspective that entails "collective experiences and community memory" (p.111) to show the power of *counterstories* that not only challenge majoritarian perspectives, but also creates a sense of community in which students of

color are able to develop tools and strategies for day-to-day survival. Through cuentos (storytelling), consejos (advice), corridos (folk songs), and legends, students of color can access resources to employ when they confront barriers in pk-12 and higher education.

It is important to note student resistance, agency, and counterstorytelling in order to show that Latina/o students respond to oppressive schooling structures in ways that points out what needs to change in order for teachers and schools to better meet their needs. Resistance can sometimes be self-defeating in that students may select to reject schooling completely and drop out or they may engage in other forms of resistance that can lead to social change. However, students also need the support of educators in order to articulate their resistance in productive ways, otherwise they are positioned as "bad" students who do not "fit in" schooling structures and classroom routines.

The repercussions of the private/public divide on Latina (mothering) students

Another component that impacts Latina students' educational lives is the messiness of their everyday lives outside of school. As young women, many Latinas are often charged with overwhelming care-taking responsibilities causing several of these students to fall behind in schools. Many Latina students often find themselves invested in the well being of others, like family, friends, and significant others. The everyday experiences of Latina youth in schools are filled with difficult choices and self-sacrifice for loved ones at home and within the community as they usually take up family caretaking responsibilities for siblings, the elderly, or other family members (Fine & Zane, 1991; Aida Hurtado, 2003; Weis, 2000). Fine and Zane (1991) explain that the lives of a large portion of Latina youth are "woven with others" and nested inside

relationships of care and responsibility. For instance, many of the young women in their study not only attended school, but they also worked outside the home in low-wage work, took care of household chores, helped their mothers take care of young siblings, and protected their male romantic partners from their parents' criticism. Traditional schools do not often validate the complexity of their gendered, classed, and racialized lives. Instead, schools presume that "what goes on *in* school—the public—should be separated from what goes on *out* of school—the private" (Fine & Zane, 1991, p. 85). The educational lives of Latina youth in U.S. schools are embedded in the institutional imposition for all students to separate their personal lives from the public/academic world. However, for several female Latina students living in economically unstable contexts, such institutional demands are unrealistic and detrimental.

The enforcement of the private/public dichotomy in schools leaves it up to young women to navigate and deal with the realities of their lives and the conflicting expectations of teachers on their own. Educators are generally not aware of the complexities that make up the lives of young women of color. This not only makes the teachers' instruction often times irrelevant to the students, it also renders invisible any valuable knowledge the student brings with them to school, which could potentially help educators engage the students in school. For teen mothers who are exclusively positioned as having made a mistake (Kelly, 1998), not only are the Latinas' experiences as a racial minority undermined in schools, but also their experiences as young women. Several Latinas drop out of school as a result of such responsibilities that are rendered incompatible with school demands (Fine & Zane, 1991; Proweller, 2000). Like the

subtractive schooling phenomenon among students of Mexican-origin, rather than looking onto the care-taking responsibilities of female students as an asset and unique form of knowledge base, young women's experiences are constructed as hardships that are obstructive to getting an education. Nevertheless, for many Latina teen mothers, even before they became pregnant, they already faced many caretaking responsibilities not acknowledged by school, which may have contributed to their prior disengagement from schooling.

Latina women also disengage from school because they feel that adults in school don't care about them (Fine & Zane, 1991; Pillow, 2004; Proweller, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999; Weis, 2000). The quality of relationships with educators has a strong impact on young women's interest in course content and their sense of belonging in the classroom and school (Fine & Zane, 1991; Berman, Silver, & Wilson, 2007; Pillow, 2007; Romo, 1998). According to Wald & Losen (2003), "school connectedness, defined as a students' feeling part of and cared for at school, is linked with lower levels of substance abuse, violence, suicide attempts, pregnancy, and emotional distress" (p. 12). The quality of relationships with educators has a strong impact on young women's interest in course content and their sense of belonging in the classroom (Fine & Zane, 1991; Berman, Silver, & Wilson, 2007; Pillow, 2007; Romo, 1998). In regards to Latina/Chicana teen mothers in particular, teachers' morals and attitudes towards Latina teen mothers play a major role in how they are treated in school. For instance, Kelly (1998) found that the "good choices discourse" permeates the beliefs of both liberal and conservative teachers in regards to the kind of support parenting students should receive, as well as the

messages that traditional schools convey if services and resources are provided to parenting students. In Kelly's study (1998), liberal teachers in the school mostly agreed with the opening of a day care center on campus on the premise that mothering students should get a 'second chance' even though they have made *poor* choices. Conservatives, on the other hand, generally disagreed with the day care center because they were concerned that it would send the wrong message to the rest of the students that it's okay to have children since the school will step in to redeem their irresponsibility. For both groups, nonetheless, the notion of *poor* choices dominated the teachers' perspectives of parenting students. Such a discourse rests on individual morality and irresponsibility, making mothering students feel inadequate, alone, and unmotivated.

According to the above literature, intersecting dynamics of race, gender, and class heavily delineate the educational lives of Latina (mothering) students. In the following section, I take a closer look at how motherhood adds further complexity to the educational trajectory of Latina teen mothers more specifically. While early motherhood presents further obstacles for young women of color, and Latina students more specifically, it has also been shown to offer opportunities for reinvention that can be positive in regards to academic achievement and the development of positive educational aspirations; the next section explores adolescent motherhood in this respect.

What does motherhood offer to mothering students?

Several studies show that motherhood radically transforms students' attitudes and sense of identity, which translates often to a renewed interest in school. Pillow (2004) points out students who were previously disengaged from school feel a "new sense of

interest and commitment to education" as a result of their pregnancy (p. 119). This is because caring for their baby means improving their lives, and one way to improve their chances for a better life is education. To help explain how and why motherhood changes the attitudes, educational aspirations, and ownership of their lives, Kaplan (1997) cites Carol Gilligan: 'women's sense of integrity appears to be entwined with an ethic of care, so that to see themselves as women is to see themselves in a relationship of connection' (p. 93). For the young Black mothers in Kaplan's (1997) study (and the mothering teens in my study), their baby constitutes a relationship of deep connection and unconditional love. They love their baby because they understand that as they love their child, he or she will love them back (Kaplan, 1997). They realize that the baby is *their* child, so there is a sense of self-fulfillment through deep connection with another life—they brought the child to the world, so it is their accomplishment. Dietrich (1998) found that some of her young Chicana respondents "perceive pregnancy and motherhood as a way to escape their "'little girl' status"; it is their "chance to make decisions independent of their parents" (p. 73). Dietrich goes on to explain that for many of the girls in her study, "life begins after pregnancy and the birth of their first child" (1998, p. 76); a rite of passage, sort of speak, into adulthood.

In a way, having a baby may be an empowering experience for young Latinas. However, I am not saying this to make the argument that young Latinas must have a baby in order to feel empowered, or that undergoing a transformation in their educational outlook as a result of motherhood is something unique or specific to young Latinas or young women of color more broadly. I am also not suggesting that Latina/o youth should

have a baby in order to obtain the motivation to continue their schooling. Instead, what the literature in this section posits is that there is something we can learn about the *experience* of early motherhood that can shed light onto how mainstream schooling must change to better "fit" the needs and lives of students and their communities in relevant ways, rather than students being labeled as "at risk" and rendered "unfit" for an education. Schools *can* take up the role of opening up spaces for connection, community, and co-constructive identity work for young women of color, especially when they have a renewed sense of educational aspirations. For instance, Kaplan (1997) notes that African American teen mothers, who were already disenfranchised in school due to non-caring teachers and faulty schooling structures, frame motherhood as a means of relying on themselves as resources of strength and resiliency.

The renewed sense of self and ownership of their lives is deeply rooted in discourses of motherhood that could be interpreted as reductionist or essentialist. However, it is important to distinguish between an essentialized embodiment of motherhood, and a strategic embodiment of motherhood. It can be rather essentializing that many women come to see themselves as women, and indeed as human, "in a relationship of connection," but I refer to it because women are nonetheless socialized, more so than men (across cultural contexts), to develop their sense of self in relation to others (especially loved ones). In this sense, the young women in Kaplan's study, as well as my young respondents (as will be shown later), develop a much more assertive sense of self as mothers because they position themselves as fighting for their child(ren). Their love as mothers differs from their love as girlfriends and daughters (prior to having their

first baby) because rather than shaping their identity in terms of their boyfriend's desire or the needs of family and friends, they develop agency and motivation to fight against the odds for the well being of their baby—fulfilling a child's need is different from fulfilling the demands of a boyfriend, friend, or a relative. Additionally, prior to giving birth to their first child, most of my young informants already felt disenfranchised from school and higher education, but after they became mothers, they felt a new sense of status and purpose to pursue a better quality of life. Thus, although it there may be essentializing aspects to entwining motherhood with young women's sense of purpose and identity, in the context of already disenfranchised women of color from education, the ways in which motherhood re-defines young mothers of color presents "spaces of possibility" (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 671) for further investigation, even though it is contradictory and problematic under other situations.

Mothering as a collective endeavor

While strategic embodiment of motherhood is a powerful means for teen mothers to gain a sense of empowerment and renewed motivation to continue their education, it is nonetheless problematic for young women to bear the brunt of care work. In the *Reproduction of Mothering* (1999), Nancy Chodorow writes that men's lack of involvement in care work perpetuates the reproduction of the gender binary, promotes a masculinity in boys that rejects social relations and the feminine, and gives men more legitimate authority because they are mainly participating in the public sphere. This reproduction of the gendered binary and division of labor reinforces dominance over women while devaluing care work that is usually feminized and regulated to the private

sphere. In *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters,* Swidler (2013) claims that if we rely on uncritical understandings of "mother," it can lead women, especially single mothers, to deny the costs to the self. This gives rise to the importance of stressing the need to spread the responsibilities of care work to men like the young women's fathers and other male relatives, as well the fathers of the children and the young women's current boyfriends who are not the children's fathers. In fact, several of the young women shared that they broke up with the fathers of their children because they felt that they were not receiving enough financial and emotional support from them, so many of the young women are either single or they more carefully chose a new boyfriend who did actively share with the care work.

It is also important for care work to be more evenly spread out among the young women and others (including men) in order to avoid neo-liberal and nuclear family patterns of the "double-shift" (Hochschild & Machung, 2012), where a culture of hyper-individualism compels young women to participate in the labor market and care for their children without the help of partners or government assistance. RGV School (the alternative school in which this study was conducted) has a daycare precisely to help teen mothers with care taking responsibilities which the young women recognized as helpful, so more developments to help with care taking in all educational spaces is critical when it comes to addressing the needs of parenting students. This gives rise to notions of "othermothering" as articulated by Patricia Hill Collins (1998, 1991), bell hooks (1984, 2000), and Toni Morrison (Hirsch, 1996; O'Reilly, 2004) in which the responsibilities of care work is allocated through communal practices of caring for children with the

purpose of addressing social inequality. According to Collins and hooks, all members of a community, male or female or of other gender identities, have a stake in taking care of children who are not their own in order to work for the well-being of humanity and create a sustainable practice of love and caring (more about othermothering and teachers will be discussed in more detail later). Othermothering, or the distribution of care work, is a process that teachers and schools can take part in in order to dismantle the uneven and oppressive distribution of care work that often falls on women and can especially hurt poor and working-class women of color who struggle to meet social expectations of "good parenting" that traditional schooling mandates (Griffith & Smith, 2007).

TEACHERS, TEACHING PRACTICES, AND PEDAGOGY

At this point, I want to focus on the critical role teachers play in opening up educational opportunities for Latina teen mothers. As I have just pointed out, teen mothers need the support of others around them, including educators, in order to fulfill their dual identities as mothers and students in a way that maintains their sense of empowerment and motivation to secure a more promising future.

Researchers have recommend that studies examine the ways in which pedagogical interactions between teachers and mothering students can further motivate these students to continue their education. Wright and Davis (2008), in particular have stressed that nurturing school environments and supportive teacher-student relationships are important for the educational achievement of mothering students. Moreover, on the one hand, Kalil and Ziol-Guest (2008) found that teen mothers who experienced little teacher support and low performance goals in their classroom enviornment often felt distressed, showed

symptoms of depression, and displayed lower levels of engagement. On the other hand, teacher support raised the level of engagement among teen mothers, and they demonstrated less symptoms of depression.

This leads me to following questions, which map out the next couple of sections regarding teacher strategies and pedagogy: Precisely how can teachers support Latina teen mothers? More specifically, how can teachers help Latina teen mothers feel a sense of belonging in school and in the classroom? How can teachers engage teen mothers in their classroom and provide them with the care and support they need to face challenging obstacles as teen mothers? How can teachers enable Latina teen mothers to feel like they are part of an extended family in the school and in the classroom? In the following sections, I will show how teen mothers need a support network to lean on in order to feel like they are not completely alone, and how teachers play a major role in this support network.

Pedagogies of Care

The notion that care is integral for the educational success of students is not new or unique to teen mothers (Noddings, 1990, 2001, 2013). As previously discussed, Latina women disengage from school as a result of feeling like they don't belong in school because they feel like teachers don't care about them, or their multiple roles as caretakers in their families is not respected or at least taken into account in school (Fine & Zane, 1991; Pillow, 2004; Proweller, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999; Weis, 2000). According to Wald & Losen (2003), "school connectedness, defined as a students' feeling part of and cared for at school, is linked with lower levels of substance abuse, violence, suicide attempts,

pregnancy, and emotional distress" (p. 12). Drawing from the work of Nel Noddings on the ethic of care in education (1990, 2001, 2013), Valenzuela (1999) has found that "aesthetic caring" is the dominant form of care that teachers and other adults in school express to Mexican origin students, rather than "authentic care." In aesthetic caring, the teacher primarily cares about students' performance on academic tasks, whereas in authentic care, the teacher embraces students in a mutually respectful and nurturing relationship. The difference between these two types of care are crucial for Mexican-origin youth who seek connection and belonging in their surroundings. With aesthetic care, many Mexican students perceive their environment as uncaring, and consequently are compelled to disengage from schooling. Valenzuela (1999) also makes a clear distinction between schooling and educación (education) in which the former refers to the U.S. schooling system and structures, whereas the latter is a much more holistic view of education that goes beyond book learning. Much like authentic care, educación for much of the Mexican community entails learning how to relate to and interact with others in respectful ways.

Hence, "connected knowing," intimate interpersonal interactions between teachers and students, co-constructing knowledge in the classroom, and sharing experiences are central tenets of an ethics of care (Noddings, 1990, 2001, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999). It is important teachers get to know their students in order to learn what their students need. Afterall, Noddings makes it clear that a caring transaction is not complete unless the one being cared for understands the interaction to be caring in the first place. Hence, in order for the teacher to actually convey care to the student, the

teacher must first understand how the students percieve care. In other words, it is important for educators to be aware of how students define care. For instance, students often feel that caring teachers are teachers who give "second chances," so students have the opportunity to make mistakes and then learn from them (Rogers, 1994). Caring teachers are also fair, they make school fun by creating meaningful and engaging activities, take the time to have conversations and learn about their students' lives, create a sense of community in the classroom, and motivate students to do better (Rogers, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). A caring teacher is also someone that helps students acadmically, assisting them and guiding them through tasks, projects, and assignments (Dempsey, 1994; Rogers 1994). Although there is much known about what students consider caring acts from their teachers, Noddings (2013) has articulated that caring is always a situation- and person-specific act, so there is no model of caring, but rather it is relational and context based.

Thus, teacher knowledge about their students over time enables educators to hone in on a collage of possbilities for how they can express care to their students. Through ongoing interactions and pedogical strategies, teachers develop an understanding of what their students need in order to succed in their classroom (Dempsey, 1994). What may have worked with one student (groups of students) may not work with another student (or group of students). For instance, in regards to teen mothers, the notion of teachers treating all students the same may not be understood as caring by a pregnant student who may need accomodations, like multiple bathroom breaks, extensions on assignments, and a chair with extra back support (Pillow, 2004). Knowledge of care is therefore co-

constructed by the teacher and students through everyday classroom experiences (Dempsey, 1994).

Earlier, I stressed that Latina teen students must feel connected to their teachers in meaningful ways and have a sense of belonging in school and in the classroom. Literature about the ethics of care in teacher practices helps uncover powerful ways that teachers can support Latina teen mothers as they continue their education. However, what are some other important pedagogical components that are essential for teachers to help Latina teen mothers in their educational pursuits? At this point, I want to further explore the notions of "connected knowing," shared experiences, community, and culture with regards to teaching. Earlier, I emphasized that Latina teen mothers often feel that they are navigating a private/public divide in which they are expected to keep home life and responsbilities away from school, especially teen mothers whose lives are intimatley tied with their child(ren). I also mentioned that Latina teen mothers need a support network in order to overcome the unique challenges they face as teen mothers. Teachers are an essential component of this network. Teachers can connect to students through culturally relevant teaching, a body of literature I will present from the vantage point of its Black feminist roots. There are some central tenets of culturally relevant teaching that set up the stage for how teachers can reimagine or extend their supportive roles in ways that promote community and a sense of belonging for Latina teen mothers.

Black Feminist Roots of Culturally Relevant Teaching

In her study of eight successful teachers of African American children, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) conceptualized culturally relevant pedagogy as a form of teaching

that empowers students socially, intellectually, emotionally, and politically by using cultural resources to impart knowledge. Evelyn Young (2010) has identified that Ladson-Billings' conceptualization rests on three criteria: academic success, cultural competence, and critical or sociopolitical consciousness. These three criteria are in turn upheld by three theoretical underpinnings: conceptions of self and others, social relations, and conceptions of knowledge (Gloria Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Young (2010) has also claimed that several studies have stayed true to Ladson-Billings central tenets, but many studies have also strayed away from this core to instead focus on using students' culture and strengths as a bridge to academic achievement. Although culturally relevant teaching is widely used, unfortunately it is often misused and misconceived by practitioners and education scholars; a limitation that Ladson-Billings has recognized herself (Young, 2010). What is missing from Young's (2010) astute argument, however, is the epistemological and methodological base from which Ladson-Billings crafted her conceptualization of culturally relevant pedagogy.

In *Towards a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, drawing from her own three-year study with eight teachers, Ladson-Billing's (1995) eloquently walked the reader through the process in which she conceptualized culturally relevant teaching. To position herself as the researcher, Ladson-Billings (1995) identified the work of Patricia Hill Collins (1991) on black feminist thought to be the most helpful theoretical grounding that acknowledged her standpoint. Ladson-Billings identifies four main propositions from Collin's work: 1) concrete experiences as a criterion of meaning, 2) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; 3) the ethic of caring, and 4) the ethic of personal

accountability (p. 471). Ladson-Billings linked these criteria to the methodological approach she used with the teachers. The methodological connections to Collin's black epistemological work provided the leverage for Ladson-Billings (1995) to theorize about the teacher's practices. Ladson-Billings (1995) has shared:

> Although Collins' work provided me with a way to think about my work as a researcher, it did not provide me with a way to theorize about the teachers' practices. Ultimately, it was my responsibility to generate theory as I practiced theory. (p. 474)

While black feminist thought, which is based on Black feminist epistemologies, did not provide Ladson-Billings a way to theorize teachers' practices, she nonetheless theorized through a Black feminist standpoint. It is though a Black feminist lens that she was able to view and understand teaching practices in a completely different light compared to studies that have been conducted through a normative lens, which translates into white heteropatriarchal epistemologies. Ladson-Billings produced an innovative conceptualization of what makes certain teaching practices successful with African American youth. In order to understand what is most relevant and effective for students of color, an oppositional or subversive epistemological lens must be used, otherwise pedagogies such as culturally relevant teaching will be misunderstood, water downed, and ultimately malpracticed. Moreover, Ladson-Billings (1995) made it clear that her methodology, based on Black feminist ways of knowing, was instrumental in creating a process that stayed true to her own standpoint as an African American woman who was

concerned about the well-being and educational success of children within the African American society.

Rather than working from an "objective" lens, she engaged with her own subjectivity to recognize both the limitations and strengths of her positionality as a researcher. By drawing from Collin's work (1991), Ladson-Billings summons the knowledge, experiences, and memory (Brown & Brown, 2010; Hirsch, 1996; O'Reilly, 2004) that have been handed from one generation to another within African American communities. This knowledge is based on the power of community, empowerment, and accountability to others (Collins, 1991; hooks, 2000; O'Reilly, 2004). Hence, culturally relevant teaching is not merely a call for teachers to bridge students' backgrounds to academic content in order to engage student interest and learning, but rather is a pedagogical exercise in which teachers are asked to think about their role as educators in relation to their students, and to question what counts as knowledge. In other words, teachers must think about how they are also mentors, members of the community in which the students are located, an extended family member, even an othermother (as I will discuss later). Teachers must be willing to think about how they are part of a larger network in meeting the needs of students. Teachers must also allow students to co-construct knowledge in the classroom by allowing their experiences to inform everyday classroom interactions. As a stand-alone text, Ladson-Billing's (1995) is often over-simplified in teacher-education programs, but her earlier writings pushed feminist thought into the forefront to provide a methodological and epistemological call for educators to think about their practices and roles as teachers. This praxis is what enables

teachers to create pedagogical interactions with students that can build community and connectedness in a more intimate rather than instrumental way.

In the next section, I will engage with another body of literature that emphasizes the particular kinds of knowledge that Latina teen mothers possess that is useful for teachers to forge community and networks of care with mothering students.

Recognizing Knowledge and Forming Networks of Care

Johnson (2009) has critiqued the ways in which teen pregnancy has been constructed as a crisis, and she has also pointed out that the consequences of early childbearing are overstated. Johnson specifically focuses on family literacy programs to rebut the 'best practices' agenda that upholds the perspective that low-income and immigrant parents are deficient in parenting skills, and hence require training to support children successfully. The best practices approach is supported by 'scientifically based' research to encompass child-centered constructive discipline, time outs, and redirection. Johnson (2009) has worked against the deficit framing of Latina teen mothers and their families in particular by invoking cultural 'wealth models' from educational and other social science theories in which socially and culturally embedded knowledge functions as a resource (Yosso, 2005). The "repositories of knowledge and information" that is available to the teen mothers via cultural and family traditions, local organizations, social networks, and even art projects are examples of culturally embedded knowledge the teen mothers accessed (Johnson, 2009). Repositioning teen mothers and their families in this way presents alternative resources that educators can access in community programs and schooling. Within the context of the particular family literacy program that she

investigates, Johnson (2009) found that Latina teen mothers navigate the parenting lessons they learn at home and within their communities to negotiate emerging ways of parenting that reflects changing family practices across time. Within their family literacy group, the young Latina mothers engaged in a context of support that enabled the young women to construct new meanings of motherhood that are relevant and validating for the women, their families, and local community.

Brubaker and Wright (2006) also considered a strength-based approach in understanding the types of interactions that successfully supports the educational aspirations and educational attainment of teen mothers. The researchers analyzed the life narratives of African American teen mothers to contextualize two constructs that have not been used extensively in research dealing with teen pregnancy: caregiving and identity transformation. More specifically, Brubaker and Wright (2006) explored how caregiving provides a context of support for positive identity transformation, which includes educational aspirations and academic achievement. They found that the teen mothers' positive identity shift into motherhood is largely influenced by the care work of relatives and other members of the community.

Similarly, in another study, Wright and Davis (2008) claimed that resilient young mothers draw social support from relatives and non-relatives in the community. For instance, research on mentoring relationships has pointed out that teen mothers have a strong preference for family members as natural mentors (Rhodes, Prescott, Davis, & Spencer, 2007), "who commonly emerge from an adolescents' natural support network" (Wright and Davis, 2008, p. 675). However, Wright and Davis also stressed that non-

relative mentors play an integral part in providing unique functions in the lives of teen mothers, such as allowing the adolescents autonomy separate from the immediate household, while still obtaining emotional support and resources provided by a caring adult like a young mothers' clergy, neighbors, peers, counselors, *and* teachers. This notion of relative and non-relative mentors in the lives of teen mothers begins to explore the idea of support networks and how teachers can be a part of this network.

Feminist conceptual shifts: reimagining 'contexts of support'

Othermothering, 'womanist teaching,' and transformational caring redefine contexts of support and teaching practices by not only enabling parenting teens to have access to continuing their education, but also changing the ways in which traditional schooling renders them as "at risk." Moreover, this thread of the literature redefines ethics of care (Gilligan, 1993; Noddings, 2001; Vogt, 2002) in teaching to incorporate communal forms of care work in addressing the needs of disadvantaged students, especially teen mothers. It also brings forth the Black feminist foundation of culturally relevant teaching as practices that compel teachers to think about their roles as teachers in a more holistic and communal way for their students.

Othermothering care.

In *Black Feminist Thought* (1991) Patricia Hill Collins' drew attention to the cultural institution of "othermothering" where women share mothering responsibilities to assist biological mothers or bloodmothers. Collins (1991) contends that African American communities recognize that "vesting one person with full responsibility for

mothering a child may not be wise or possible" (p. 119) in light of the interlocking systems of oppression and hostile environment that African American women face as they mother their children. The centrality of women and communal forms of mothering in African American culture stems from West African cultural values and resilient adaptations to race and gender oppression. The woman-centered networks of sisters, aunts, cousins, and grandmothers in organized child-care provides a generalized ethic of caring that make up the foundation of Black women's political activism.

While these networks of communal child-care are women-centered, men "have [also] well-defined and culturally significant roles in the extended family" (Collins, 1991, p. 119). bell hooks (1984) also treads the way for recognition of othermothering care work in her concept of "revolutionary parenting" from which hooks argues that both women and men are important players in the development of children. hooks (1984) asserts that children need multiple care givers to act as resources for the child's emotional, intellectual and material needs because the idea of parents meeting a child's every need is unrealistic. Similarly, Trejos-Castillo and Frederick (2011) discuss that Latina/o family members often feel a strong, mutual responsibility to care for and support one another, hence Latina/o families represent a significant source of social support and guidance. Social connections, cooperation, and collective needs are valuable resources held in high esteem, which opens up possibilities of othermothering in Latina/o communities and schools.

The next section demonstrates that the tradition of othermothering ties into womanist teaching in which teachers are aware of the ways in which their students of

color and communities are disenfranchised through hegemonic standards that stem from a history of slavery and colonization (P. H. Collins, 1991; hooks, 2000).

Womanist Teaching

Drawing from Alice Walker's definition of womanist as someone who is "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female" (1990, p. 370), feminist of color scholars have thought about social and communal responsibility as an essential aspect of teaching. The care and support parenting teens may receive from othermothers in their own communities and families demonstrates an important resource that teachers in mainstream schooling can draw from as they find relevant ways to support the educational endeavors of parenting students. For instance, Collins (1991) highlighted that teachers can become community othermothers through 'mothering the mind' relationships that can develop between Black women teachers and their students. Collins (1991) used hooks concept of 'mothering the mind' to emphasize that this student-teacher relationship goes beyond traditional mentoring in which students are typically provided with "technical skills or a network of academic and professional contacts" (p. 131). Edwards (2003) further elaborated on hooks' notion of 'mothering the mind' to describe "academic mothering" that can take the form of advisement that may be academic or personal. Within the context of higher education and academia, Edwards (2003) explained that women faculty of color recognize the particular experiences and obstacles students of color face as they navigate the university as an institution.

It is often expected that faculty women of color will "'mother' everyone in addition to fulfilling the responsibilities for which she is being paid" (Edwards, 2003, p.

146). However, Edwards also stresses that Black women in academia who engage in community mothering ensure the survival, retention, and graduation of students of color within the academy and higher education. Edward uses the concepts of academic mothering and mothering the mind to situate the importance of recognizing, validating, and compensating the care work that women of color faculty provide to students of color. Edwards posits that research evidence has shown that academic mothering and the formation of support networks and organizing have been most effective in contributing to various universities' good standing of racial minority student retention and diversity.

In regards to pK-12 schooling, (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002) draws from the work Patricia Hill Collins and Alice Walker's term 'womanist' to point out the epistemological perspectives of African American teachers. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) contributes to the discussion of caring in education by coneptualizing and describing 'womanist caring' of African American teachers. Black women teachers often see themselves as "othermothers" who commit to the social and emotional development of all children in the community. They feel a sense of shared responsibility and a form of caring that is "not simply interpersonal but profoundly poltical in intent and practice" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p. 77).

Auguste (2011) has stated that othermother teachers have been present in the African American pedagogical tradition from the 1860's to the present. Pedagogical othermothering has been a method of educational and cultural transmission amongst African Americans, as well as [a] primary method of resisting racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression" (p.127). Many African American teachers have long

defined mothering as taking collective responsibility for others in the community to overcome racial and gender oppression that has threatened the life opportunities of their students and communities (Auguste, 2011).

Transformational caring

Like the womanist caring among several Black women teachers, Ochoa (2011) also reimagined caring in education through her concept of "transformational caring—activities that are undertaken within or beyond the home space for the good of individuals and communities in order to challenge or change traditional ideologies or practices" (p.105). Ochoa (2011) asserts that it is especially crucial for the researcher to examine examples of transformational caring in the current historical moment of "top-down market-based educational policies" (p. 105) in which Mexican American families are blamed and students shortchanged through inferior schooling. Ochoa's qualitative study locates and discusses the transformational caring that teachers of color demonstrate in their daily practices and interactions with students, families, and community members that merges teacher support with networks of care that goes beyond the school walls to connect with the surrounding community. For instance, one Latina school administrator welcomes the working class Latina/o community onto her campus, even though several teachers do not agree with this approach. In other cases, teachers not only welcomed parental involvement, but also support parental and community advocacy and activism to address educational concerns for the children in the community.

On a related thread, López and Lechuga (2007) also conducted a qualitative study in which they examine the positive impacts of school-based, parent-run community living

rooms, or salas comunitarias, on the academic achievement, school engagement, and confidence building of Latina students. They found that the salas comunitarias greatly contributed to creating a school context that shapes the resiliency of racially stigmatized youth. López and Lechuga (2007) also utilize othermothering to make sense of the ways in which Latina students can create support networks that encompass non-relative Latina women as care givers, counselors, advisors, and liaisons between Latina teens' parents and their teachers.

Why is othermothering and connecting with students important?

This literature on othermothering, womanist teaching, and transformational caring is useful in thinking about the plethora of supportive roles teachers can embody in order to work with Latina teen mothers. Teachers can also become part of a larger social network with parents, extended family members, community mentors, and other folks whom Latina teen mothers confide in, in order to address the multiple needs they may have as they navigate their dual identities as students and mothers. However, it is important to note that the notion of teachers becoming othermothers is not an easy role to fulfill, especially because teachers already feel overwhelmed with an array of responsibilities in a high stakes testing and accountability education system. Many teachers experience burn out, and have difficulty maintaining enthusiasm and energy for their students (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer, 1996; Farber, 1991; Kyriacou, 1987; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). Many teachers also feel that it is not their job to parent students, but to focus on teaching academic information. Valenzuela

(1999) highlighted this fact when she pointed out the following reality about teachers who could not connect with their Latina/o students:

> "Teachers are committed to an institutional fetish that views academics as the exclusive domain of the school. This fetish supports the status quo by preserving the existing boundaries between the obstensively "public" school and the "private" matters of family and community" (p.74)

Valenzuela (1999) further explained that when students' private matters entered the classroom to create complicated interactions with teachers it was too troubling and discomforting. While these uncomfortable interactions forced the teachers to begin thinking about how to change their pedagogical strategies and classroom protocols, their reflexivity would be interrupted by their own "blanket judgments" about the student's ethnicity, culture, and community through deficit perspectives. Rather than following through with changing their practices in the classroom, they resorted to individual blame of the students' shortcomings. The teachers' self-reflexivity would also be disrupted by claims that they were not social workers, counselors, parents, or "baby sitters," so care and nurturance was "explained away as residing outside the parameters of their job description as teachers" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 256). This kept the teachers from connecting and responding to their students as "whole human beings" (p. 74).

Valenzuela also noted that teachers who were successful with Latina/o students understood the collective and individual needs of their students. For instance, the band director fed his students taquitos in order to keep them nourished and ready for school, while another teacher allowed his students to rewrite their papers and use their home

languages (i.e. Spanish) to complete their assignments. Another social studies teacher openly expressed how much she loved and enjoyed her ninth graders. The expression of love and joy was enough to make her a favorite among students. To express love in schooling institutions can be powerful declarations that disrupt the impersonal and bureaucratic environments in which students and teachers are nested. Another article that centers the perspectives and voices of 7th grade students in a culturally and linguistically responsive school also shows the importance of how teachers must forge intimate "parental-like" interactions with students (Orange, 2013). Many of the students shared that they felt their school and their teachers were like their extended family because they cared deeply about their well-being and academic progress. The students expressed that they felt like the school as a whole was like a family and the teachers were like their parents who regularly conveyed that they loved their students (Orange, 2013).

I want to make clear, however, that I am not necessarily vouching for teachers to become parental figures for their students. Instead, I am demonstrating how it is critical for teachers to locate themselves within a larger network of supportive adults for Latina teen mothers. Mothering students need access to multiple people in their lives in order to navigate their overwhelming responsibilities as both parents and students (including other familial and social responsibilities they may possess as many Latina teens often do within their communities as explained earlier). It is also important for teachers to be in tune with the complexities and messiness of Latina teen mothers' lives in order to know what sort of pedagogical strategies would work best for them in the classroom. And lastly, Latina

teen mothers must feel like they have a sense of belonging in the classroom through teacher practices that emphasize reciprocity, love, joy, and community.

SCHOOLS AS SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

The literature regarding various pedagogical tools teachers can employ to better meet the needs of their students is extensive, and in the sections above I focused on particular schools of thought that are useful with setting up the stage for the kinds of pedagogical interactions I witnessed in the three classrooms I observed at RGV School. After introducing literature about what teachers can do for historically marginalized youth, I now turn to what teachers need at a contextual and structural level in order to adopt pedagogies that incite care, community, and social responsibility. In other words, what do teachers need in order to do care work for their students? How does the culture of a school, as well as its organizational and structural characteristics enable or limit caring and culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogical interactions in the classroom?

Alternative Schooling Spaces

RGV School, the alternative school in which my study will take place, is an alternative school for teen parents and non-parenting teens. Harkening back to the initial story I present at the start of chapter one, the young woman whose graduation was celebrated by the entire school is an example of how alternative schools "personalize learning and other activities that are often handled in quite impersonal ways" (Raywid, 1993, p. 34); this can be thought of as a manifestation of authentic care that contributes to a sense of community at RGV School. According to Mary Anne Raywid (1993), all

schools have a culture or climate, whether positive or negative, but not all schools *accomplish* community (i.e. caring, ownership, commitment, respect and trust). For Raywid (1993), to assert that a school is a community is to:

> …suggest that within it one finds genuine interest in and acknowledgment of all individuals involved by other individuals—students as well as teachers, administrators, and staff. Awareness of and responsiveness to others' happiness or sorrow, growth, accomplishments, and misfortunes is an integral part of daily life in the school that is a community. Such a school is a place where those involved bring their psyches, a place they can be and express themselves and find companionship, understanding, and support. It is thus a place they find attractive: It is *theirs*, not just an institution, but a place in which to live and find meaning. What is more, those involved in such a school community share an awareness and self-consciousness of these characteristics. (p. 24)

Supportive schools that foster an environment of care and validation have been shown to make a difference in the life trajectories and educational outlook of teen parents (Berman et al., 2007; Parra-Cardona, Sharp, & Wampler, 2008; Parra-Cardona, Wampler, & Sharp, 2007; SmithBattle, 2007; Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, 2009), so spaces that create community are essential. The literature regarding separate programs and alternative schools for pregnant/mothering teens and "at-risk" students is composed of mixed views about the disservice (Burdell, 1995; Pillow, 2007) and benefits (Fine & Zane, 1991; Proweller, 2000) of such spaces for disenfranchised youth.

For example, studies have also shown that alternative spaces only serve to segregate, track, and stigmatize "at-risk" youth while the oppressive schooling structures goes unquestioned and remains intact (Burdell, 1995; Munoz, 2004). Pillow (2004) points out that there are several problems with teen pregnancy programs and schools, especially for racial minority youth, in regards to the type of education they receive (i.e. how comparable it is to their peers' educational experience and academic opportunities in traditional schools), but she also notes that there are possibilities and potential in separate single-sex schools for teen mothers and schools with special programming for parenting teens. For instance, Proweller's (2000) ethnographic study highlights that for "pregnant teens, the relief available through an alternative school is especially significant since their pregnant bodies are often the target of critique and violence, creating an unequivocal need for alternative educational spaces" (p. 104). Although it has been noted that alternative schools prioritize building communities of support over academics, thereby hindering the educational opportunities for "at-risk" youth (Burdell, 1995, Pillow, 2007; Munoz, 2004), critical feminist studies have noted that such spaces are useful in fostering countervoices by marginalized women as well as nuanced social critique that trouble mainstream schooling (Berman et al., 2007; Biklen & Pollard, 2001; Byrd, 2011; Fine & Zane, 1991; Kelly, 2007; Leadbeater & Way, 2007; Proweller, 2000; Rock, 2007).

While the question of whether alternative schools are comparable to their mainstream counterparts in regards to academic and extracurricular activities continues to be debated, such spaces have nonetheless been shown to be much more supportive, responsive, and relevant to the needs of students (Burdell, 1995; Proweller, 2000; Munoz,

2004; Pillow, 2007; Smith, 1993). As I have shown throughout this chapter, Mexican-origin youth commonly go through subtractive whitestream schooling that does not validate student knowledge, and teachers have treated these students with disrespect or at most, aesthetic care, which does not translate into genuine care by racial minority youth. This lack of care, validation, and respect often causes disengagement from students, so whether academics is comparable or not to traditional schooling, special programs and alternative schools for Latina/o teen parents must establish community in order to (re)engage students before any sort of academic learning can happen in the first place. The mixed studies regarding alternative schools do not reach a consensus on whether alternative schools are "good" or "bad," and there is also very little research on separate schools for "low-performing" racial minority students (Malagon, 2010). I do not aim to defend alternative schools per se, but instead to think about the implications for what alternative schools can do for disenfranchised youth and what scholars, education policy makers, and education practitioners can learn from them in regards to what works well for students. This provides an opportunity for my study to contribute more information regarding the potential of alternative school spaces and the ways in which teen mothers make meaning out their classroom experiences in separate schools—specifically for Mexican teen parents in the U.S./Mexico border area. The lessons learned from alternative schools could be applied towards changes in traditional schools.

There's more than one kind of alternative school

It is important to discuss that there isn't one type of alterative school, but rather different schools that cater to or have been developed to address certain populations of

students, a fact that may contribute to the mixed views about these schools. Raywid (1993) has identified three types of alternative schools. Type I schools appeared in the 1960's in response to demands that schools should be 'humane, more responsive, more challenging, and more compelling for all involved' (p.25). Type II, in contrast, have been designed as 'soft jails' since students are 'sentenced' (p.26) to them as one final opportunity before expulsion. Some of these students may be able to return to their original school as a reward for good behavior. Type III schools are a response for preventing "at-risk" students from dropping out. Type II schools usually have punitive and highly structured behavioral plans, but some of them more closely resemble Type III programs in which the staff may take a more positive and compassionate stance (Raywid, 1993). Although it may be a stigmatizing to attend Type II and III schools, many students have felt that they have been 'expelled to a friendlier place' (Raywid, 1993, p. 26). Raywid, however, has also pointed out that teachers in these schools may locate reasons for failure in students rather than critiquing school structures and practices to change them.

Compared to Type I schools, in which students are viewed as high achievers, teachers in Type II and III schools may lean towards "clinical" approaches (a therapeutic model) in which they remain as the professionals "engineering the development of their students, rather than first and foremost human beings accompanying them and guiding the young in their progress toward competent maturity" (Raywid, 1993, p. 27). This perpetuates the development of two subcultures, students vs. teachers, which can be adversarial, rather than one communal culture among students *and* adults. In either case,

Type I and III schools are more positive and invitational across the board, compared to Type II schools that are less likely to have a positive orientation (Raywid, 1993, p. 27).

RGV School can be classified as a Type III school, and even though this type of school is usually premised on a clinical/therapeutic approach, it may have spaces of opportunity in which students and teachers may work beyond deficit-oriented limitations in unexpected ways.

Teachers need a caring support network too

Much like students, teachers also need supportive school structures and networks to feel a sense of belonging, ownership, autonomy, and community among those around them in the school (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Courtney & Noblit, 1994; Danin, 1994; Raywid, 1993; Valenzuela, 1999). The impersonal and bureaucratic atmosphere and structure of traditional schools, especially those that are in underserved in historically marginalized communities, tend to overwhelm teachers by isolating them in overcrowded classrooms with little curricular autonomy (Valenzuela, 1999). They also have very little say in regards to the governance of the school and are instead under the gun with testing benchmarks, rigid timelines for covering objectives, impersonal teacher training, documentation, and deadlines on a multitude of tasks with little relevance to their students in the classroom (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Courtney & Noblit, 1994; Danin, 1994; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982; Valenzuela, 1999; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). Alternative schooling spaces, however, have been known to provide the context teachers need to optimize the care and support they can provide to their own students in the classroom (Raywid, 1993; Wehlage et al., 1989). In a study about 14

alternative schools, Wehlage et. al. (1989) pointed out key characteristics about the schools that actively fostered caring pedagogical interactions and relationships between teachers and students. First of all, they emphasized a school culture in which teachers shared a similar set of values and beliefs about students and their education, which consisted of: (1) accountability for student success; extended role for teachers; persistence with students to never give up; and optimism for their students' potential. What especially stands out about the teachers' core values and beliefs about their teaching is that they saw themselves as more than "formal educators," they also acted as mentors, extended family members, and counselors for their students (Wehlage et al., 1989). However, in order for the teachers to extend their roles and reach out to their students in caring ways, they needed the structural and organizational support of the school. It has been noted that teachers in alternative schools have greater autonomy, self-governance, and professonal collegiality in which they can forge supportive relationships with one another, like covering one another's classrooms on short notice and coordinating field trips, school events, and community projects for the entire school (Raywid, 1993; Wehlage et al., 1989). Small class sizes and flexibility in regards to curriculum are some major perks that also provide support for teachers to engage in caring pedagogies (Courtney & Noblit, 1994).

EVERYDAY CLASSROOM LIFE

At this point I want reiterate my two research questions in order to connect the relevance of the literature I have presented to the goal of my inquiry: *(1) What are the pedagogical interactions and relationships that unfold between teachers and Latina*

mothering students of in the classroom setting of an alternative high school that houses a teen parenting program? (2) How do the Latina mothering students experience and make sense of the classroom pedagogical interactions and relationships with their teachers? First, I have given an account of what the educational lives and trajectories of Latina teen mothers is like in U.S. schools in order to demonstrate how many undergo a transformation in renewing their interest in school. However, they need certain support structures and networks in place in order to address their unique needs. Teachers are powerful allies of support and motivation for teen mothers, so in my second section I ventured into literature that helps unpack pedagogical tools that teachers may engage in order connect with mothering students. And thirdly, I took into account the importance of school context, by addressing how alternative schools provide opportunities for educators to practice caring and community-oriented pedagogies with their students. Teachers also need support and care in order to meet the needs of students who face unique obstacles.

It is important to note, however, that my research questions bring into focus everyday classroom life and the sort of pedagogical interactions that unfold between the teachers and mothering students in that space. Although, my inquiry is not over the workings of the alternative school at an institutional level per se, the pedagogical interactions and relationships that I observed in the classroom pointed out the ways in which structural and organizational characteristics of the school came into play in allowing certain classroom dynamics, while limiting other possibilities of beneficial pedagogies for teen mothers. Hence, the everyday pedagogical occurrences, no matter

how small or mundane, point out larger forces and structures of the classroom and the school (Jackson, 1968).

In the next section, I situate my theoretical framework for my study of the pedagogical interactions that unfold between teachers and mothering students at an alternative school along the U.S./Mexico border.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My dissertation explores two main levels of analysis: (a) the interactions between teachers and students; and (b) how the school's structure as well as wider discourses of education, success, and social mobility facilitate particular interactions to take place. The theoretical tools I use in my analysis are gender as a social structure (enriched by Chicana and Black feminisms), and tools to link the individual interactions to the institution in which they happen.

I organize my theory in this way because I will be looking simultaneously at how a teacher may react in flexible ways to mothering students' needs, but this can only happen if the school structure supports the teacher's response to her students, and the students' practices align with how the school understands success and social mobility for disenfranchised students. At the structural level, the school must recognize mothering students as valuable and worthy of an education, and give the teachers the ability to create flexible work-submission schedules and the culture of care needed to respond to the ever-changing needs of this population. At the same time, the teachers and the school still espouse normative discourses of success, so while flexibility and care are promoted, students must align certain beliefs and practices with taken-for-granted understandings of

individuality, efficiency, and future-oriented mentalities that allow for social mobility. In addition, seeped in the school structure, as well as the practices, beliefs, and interactions between teachers and students, are gender and racial discourses unique to the particular population of students in the Rio Grande Valley. For example, beliefs about Mexican young women, as well as pregnant and mothering students of Mexican-origin all impact how the students and teachers interact, and how the school will recognize who is being successful, albeit with a modified structure to account for the challenges particular student populations face.

In other words, because I am dealing with gendered beliefs, practices, and interactions within an alternative school structure, my theory covers two main areas: (a) critical and feminist gender theory to understand the interactions between teachers and students; and (b) Bourdieu's theories of practice within social structures and institutions that organize how people will recognize each other's practices, and thus achieve social mobility. My gender theory is based on R.W. Connell's understanding of gender as a social structure and an organizing principle that organizes access to power, access to resources, and the way relationships and interactions will unfold between people. Gender for Connell is not a list of characteristics (e.g. masculine behaviors or feminine qualities), but rather a more abstract way of organizing human activity and interactions. Nevertheless, particular expressions of gender and sexuality are understood in specific ways (e.g. masculine and feminine) that will grant more or less access to power and resources to individuals. To further understand the historical, racial, and economic expressions of gender and sexuality in RGV, my understanding of gender is enriched by

Chicana feminist theory. Moreover, the responses of teachers towards the students are characterized by particular expressions of care, and the teachers engage in insurmountable care work and care labor to meet the needs of students. While care work and labor tend to be looked down on as unequal burdens in middle-class, white theorizing of women's identities and work, it can take on different meanings for communities of color who depend on care work and care labor for survival and upward mobility in the U.S. context, where women of color and the people in their lives are marginalized. Therefore, a second way my gender theory is enriched is by using Black feminist thought and Black womanist theories of care work and other mothering. In the following section, I explain in more detail my general gender theory, Chicana feminism, Black feminism/womanism, and my take on Bourdieu's theory of practice.

GENDER THEORY

Chicana feminist theory: disruptive bodies and living with contradictions.

> If we move beyond sex as a biological category and place gender in its social and political context, what emerges is that among low-income adolescents, being female means caring for relatives and neighbors (not only after 3:00); thinking about the world in contradictory, creative, sometimes self-defeating and sometimes self-enhancing ways, and about social ideologies that require disruption; and having a body that is changing, moving, transforming, and being transformed. (Fine & Zane, 1991, p. 90)

Several feminists within and outside the education arena have theorized about the "demise of the artificial separation between public and private" (Burdell, 1995, p. 190).

Mothering (parenting) students represent the ways in which the public/private divide can no longer hold; hence teen parents are like a test case of "how schools will repoliticize or depoliticize these students and their needs" (Burdell, 1995, p.190). Currently it seems that schools are moving towards reprivatization in which teen parent issues are situated outside the social realm and in the private sphere. Thus, the needs of school-aged mothers are 'leaky' (Pillow, 2006; Pillow, 2004) overflowing school boundaries that attempt to contain the needs of teen mothers as 'just economic' or 'just family' issues (Burdell, 1995). However, schools are located at the intersection of the familial, economic, and social realms, and it is at this nexus that the identities and stories of teen parents are crafted. Chicana feminist theory is a helpful way to analyze how the messiness and "in-between" realities of teen mothers enter the classroom, and how the teachers I observed made sense of the young women and how to best help them. In the next two sections I point out specific aspects of Chicana feminist theory that have helped me make sense of my data through a nuanced lens. This lens allows me to position contradictions that I observed in the classroom as interstitial spaces of pedagogical possibilities and growth.

Nepantla

Anzaldua's conceptualization of nepantla is helpful in making sense of what it means to live and embody contradictions. Nepantla is a "Nahuatl word/concept for that ambiguous, tentative, ever-changing space we all inhabit" (Perez, 2005, p. 1). It is the in-between space where permeable identities overlap to break down fixed categories of identity. This is the space where the woman of color resides, a "decolonial imaginary – that space between colonial and postcolonial…where [she] makes sense of her agency"

(Pérez, 2005, p. 4). Marginalized women do not have the luxury to think of themselves and their responsibilities in terms of "just" being women, as other intersecting identities of race, class, sexuality, ability (among others) can contradict normative (middle-class, white, heterosexual, fully-able bodied) expectations of femininity. A woman of color from the border learns how to diffuse through her multiple permeable identities as she decides which will "take center stage" (Reuman & Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 12) at the appropriate time. These 'limen creatures,' or nepantla creatures, "are extremely threatening to any world that requires 'unification, either psychologically, morally, politically, or metaphysically'" (Hurtado, 1997, p. 412). These worlds include the imagined nuclear family that resides in the private sphere, and an idealized classroom with asexual middle-class youth that reside in the public sphere. For women of color and youth, especially young mothers of color, their embodied experiences are a threat to the idealized public/private split that schools seek to maintain. Women of color navigate the interstitial spaces between multiple worlds/realties, and can develop conocimiento—the state of engagement with multiple states of consciousness that encompass 'all dimensions of life, both inner—mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, bodily realms—and outer—social, political, lived experiences…' (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2006, p. 22). This epistemological intersection is one that demands knowing multiple worlds, knowing how to portray oneself differently in each world, and the liminal spaces between them, where they overlap and where they contradict.

Nepantla, then, is a useful Chicana feminist theoretical tool that allows me to articulate issues of identity, experience, the body, and the permeability of social

structures. It is a very difficult epistemological site to occupy, as it can create confusion and disorientation for those outside of the experiences of the interstitial bodies, but it also consists of "a transparent side where there is clarity, creativity, and self-determination" (Medina, 2010, p. 209). From this epistemological standpoint, although teen parents of color live with ambiguity and contradictions throughout their educational lives, their embodied knowledge can serve as a site for social critique, countervoices, and change. As limen creatures, women of color know that there are other possibilities for their existence, because they are living those experiences.

Moreover, nepantla has helped me think about everyday classroom life as "third spaces," which are an ideal setting to examine the educational lives of teen mothers. The notion of third spaces refers to structured social spaces with fleeting moments in which multiple discourses, scripts, and dialogue can overlap, clash, and contradict in ways that can disrupt institutionalized roles of teacher and student in (traditional) classrooms. These fleeting moments present oppositional instances in which institutional scripts are interrupted and a different set of discourses and interactions momentarily emerge, in which students and teacher roles must change to traverse unexplored territory. For instance, in my study, this unexplored territory became moments of teacher self-disclosure in which one teacher, in particular, became vulnerable in ways that shook up the institutional expectation that teachers are supposed be in control of their composure in the classroom at all times.

Sitios y lenguas

Emma Perez (1998) draws from the work of French feminist Luce Irigaray, to stress the importance of creating the female imaginary in which "women 'break away' into separate spaces as a political strategy" (p. 105). Perez (1998) identifies this process as a form of strategic essentialism that is "not permanent or fixed but instead somewhat dialectical, acknowledging irreducible differences within separate sitios y lenguas where the resolution of differences is neither desirable nor necessary" (p. 105). Hence, a woman-centered space is not exclusive in the sense that the women in the group are solely focused on their identities as women and have a stake in preserving some essentialized account of women's experiences, but rather it is a way to separate into "decolonized third world spaces of our own making" (Perez, 1994, p. 105)—a decolonial imaginary that serves as a point of departure for making sense of agency in ways that trouble the very social order that constructs the women in oppressive ways. Hence, third space feminist conceptualization of sitios y lenguas (sites and discourses) enables the construction of new social imaginings and understandings of people of color. For example, the construction of a school and classrooms in which teen parents are not a disappointment, but rather students full of promise.

A critical feminist lens is necessary in making sense of young parents' realities as gendered, "at-risk" students of color who embody multiple worlds and challenge traditional schooling spaces. A third space feminist perspective can shed new understandings of what alternative school settings and programs offer in terms of supporting students, and potentially how these settings can shake up the ideological and

discursive foundations of mainstream schools. Proweller (2000) has stated the following regarding the possibilities of such spaces:

> Constructive identity work going on in segregated school spaces has the potential to seep into the broader public arena and interrupt misconceptions that have long taken hold in the public imagination. Private matters are thrust back into the public arena in terms that bear the imprint of teenage girls hard at work reimagining themselves as participatory members of the larger social collective. (p.117)

Sitios y lenguas is a handy tool from which I can make sense of the classroom teacher-student interactions and relationships that I observed in a classroom that was completely composed of teen mothers.

Black feminism/womanism

Because the vantage point of white elite men has been universalized and even naturalized, in *Black Feminist Thought* (1991) Collins posits that the knowledge of subordinated groups can be best viewed as "subjugated knowledge." Hence, the suppression of disenfranchised people has led women of color, for instance (and for Collins Black women in particular), "to use alternative sites…such as everyday behavior as important locations" for creating "independent self-definitions and self-valuations" (Collins, 1991, p. 202). The young mothers in my study, like most subordinate groups, have had to create "alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge" (Collins, 1991, p. 202), in this case the criteria for what qualifies as a good student through their own standpoint as young Mexican-origin mothers seeking an education in the

U.S/Mexico borderlands. It is important to note that they did not carve this space alone, as it requires not only the care and validation from teachers, but also a school structure that validates the interactions between teachers and pregnant/mothering students. This is because it takes the recognition and validation from the institution and people with more power than students within that institution (teachers) to change deeply seeded prejudice and negative feelings towards the bodies of teenage, pregnant and mothering girls.

Education scholars (Hatt, 2011; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Urrieta, 2009; Yosso, 2002) have noted that U.S. mainstream schooling and the production of knowledge (like who is considered a "good" and "smart" student) is premised on white, middle-class, Eurocentric, and masculinist conceptions, practices, experiences, and understandings of the world (see Hatt's, 2011 account of the construction of "smartness" and intelligence). Mainstream criteria of what makes a "good" student is one who usually has enough resources at home, and care-taking responsibilities fulfilled by others (namely white-middle class mothers, see Griffith & Smith, 2007) to keep their private and public lives separate, so that they are able to focus on their individual endeavors and academic achievement in school. Teen mothers do not fit into this standard set of criteria, so they rely on their "concrete experiences" (Collins, 1991) as mothers to build another set of criteria or validation process of what it means to be a good student. However, Collins (1991) further explains such alternative knowledge claims rarely threaten conventional knowledge because knowledge claims from the standpoint of the subordinated are "routinely ignored, discredited, or simply absorbed and marginalized in existing paradigms" (p. 219). For Collins (1991), alternative ways of knowing must challenge the

basic processes used by the elite to legitimate their knowledge claims in order to actually challenge those logics. In other words, "if the epistemology used to validate knowledge comes into question, then all prior knowledge claims validated under the current model become suspect" (p. 219). Taking Collins' argument into account, in order for teachers to support the needs of parenting students, theoretically speaking, the core structural logics and practices that validate some experiences over others *in the classroom* must change in congruence with the meaning-making identity practices of disenfranchised groups like mothering teens. In this way, black feminist theory has helped me understand the pedagogical ways in which the teachers I observed have repositioned teen mothers as good students in their classroom. The mothering students and the teachers are co-constructing practices that legitimizes teen mothers as model students, and the structure of the alternative school also helps shape these practices in the classroom.

As discussed in the literature review earlier in this chapter, Black feminist/womanist theorizing has also led to uncovering the importance of othermothering in order to work against oppressive social structures to raise African-American youth (Collins, 1998; Collins, 1991; hooks, 2000). In the literature review, I highlighted how othermothering can provide pedagogical tools that can help teachers better meet the needs of historically marginalized students like teen mothers. However, I also position this literature as a theoretical tool in order to make sense of how the teachers I observed grapple with their roles as teachers in relation to the complexity of their students' lives outside of school. Othermothering becomes the validation process of teachers to respond to the needs of mothering teens.

Gender as an "organizing principle"

The feminisms of color outlined above describe the tools that help me observe and analyze the nuances in the interactions between teachers and students within an alternative school. These interactions, as well as the institution, also need to be understood as coexisting with gender as a social structure. For my study, I follow R.W. Connell's (2005) definition of gender "as a way in which social practice is ordered" (p. 71). While gender in the United States is a symbolic bifurcation of bodies and practices as "masculine" and "feminine," understanding gender as a social structure requires seeing beyond a list of categories, behaviors, and even bodies. Gender, according to Connell, should be seen as an "organizing principle." It is not a characteristic of individuals, nor something that individuals truly feel inside of them, but it is a social practice that organizes how power will be allocated, how bodies will be appreciated, how particular bodies will have access to resources (including education and teachers' time), and how interactions between different bodies will take place. Gender is deeply entrenched in our society, and it has a history and has an emotional dimension. In other words, gender organizes even how we feel and how we react to particular people and situations. As Connell (2005) writes, "gender is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not a social practice reduced to the body" (p. 71).

Moreover, "gender is a way of structuring social practice in general, not a special type of practice" (Connell, 2005, p. 75). This means that gender is not men being masculine and dominant, or women being feminine and passive, but rather gender is the structure that even allows for such as distinction like masculine and feminine to exist as a

logical way of viewing the world. In addition, because gender is not a special list of practices, it can more easily be seen as interacting with other ways of organizing the social world, such as ethnicity, race, sexuality, and class.

Finally, gender is also a structure of inequality. In our particular time in history, we have inherited gender as a way of organizing power along the axis of an imagined binary: masculinity and femininity. Within this binary, men as a social group have privileges, and women as a social group are subordinated vis-à-vis men as a social group. However, Connell recognizes that there are many diverse masculinities and femininities wrought with privileges and oppressions, and thus a clear hierarchy is not always apparent. While there is a historical division of power between men as one social group and women as another social group, this power can be contested as individuals interact with each other, resulting in a constant change of the gender structures (yet still with the durability of masculinity having power over femininity).

Understanding gender as an organizing social practice has helped me make sense of the gendered power dynamics I observed in two of the classrooms that I visited. For instance, the teachers' attention was often preoccupied with redirecting or providing extra guidance to the male students in the class, while the mothering students enacted feminine ways of being in order to position themselves in favorable ways with the teachers. Connell's ideas enabled me to understand how these gendered classroom dynamics work as a collective social practice in which both teachers and students participate in ways that reinforces gender norms and reifies particular gendered codes of conduct and performativity from the students and teachers. Moreover, it can be argued that

othermothering and the care labor that teachers engage in is facilitated by education being positioned as a feminized profession, and all the teachers I observed being women whose gender identities are validated through expressions of care. Gender has organized the care given by teachers to their students, the teachers' ability to provide care in the first place, and education being a feminized profession in which care is an appropriate expression for teachers to engage in.

BOURDIEU'S THEORY OF PRACTICE

Finally, to connect the intricacies of the practices and interactions between students and teachers in my study to the alternative school as an institution that allows for these interactions to happen in the first place, I used Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, institutions/structures, and the logic of practice that binds habitus and institutions. In *The Logic of Practice* (1990) Bourdieu explains that practices can be understood as the dialectic of *habitus* and *institutions*. In other words, "this logic is seen in paradigmatic form in the dialectic of expressive dispositions and instituted means of expression" (p.57). Habitus can be defined as the dispositions that individuals learn over time, which organize their actions towards social situations. Individuals can have multiple forms of expression organized by the *habitus*, but for these expressions to count they must be validated by the institutions within which they operate. According to Bourdieu, institutions do not fully determine how individuals will act, behave, or talk because individuals have different life histories that have taught them lessons about what is appropriate in different situations (and if they do not know, they improvise). Additionally, institutions cannot exist if people do not collectively behave according to

some semblance of what the institution sanctions as appropriate behavior. As Bourdieu writes, "the *habitus* is what enables the institution to attain full realization: it is through the capacity of incorporation, which exploits the body's readiness to take seriously the performative magic of the social, that the king, the banker or the priest are hereditary monarchy, financial capitalism or the Church made flesh" (p. 57). An alternative school can only exist as long as teachers and students within it act in ways that give validity to the school's goals and values. Simultaneously, a teacher cannot act like a caring and flexible teacher unless the alternative school structure validates those practices. Considering the positionality of the students, whereas in traditional schools teen parenting is seen as an irresponsible act that is marginalized or even punished, an alternative school may recognize teen parents as very mature and full of promise, which validates students' efforts and also validates teachers who want to be flexible towards them.

Moreover, Bourdieu (1984, 1990, 2001) claims that there has to be an interplay between structural change and change in practice. To change the structure is to change the conditions that enable the production of dispositions. Thus, teachers are apt to engage in caring pedagogies within an institution that validates such practices as part of its core logics of what make a "good" teacher. And within a caring institution with caring teachers, mothering students have a different set of evaluative criteria from which to position themselves as "good" students. Traditional schools, which operate through a different set of core logics and evaluative criteria, that does not prioritize care and connection, produces a different set of pedagogical interactions between teachers and

students in which care is often the exception rather than the rule. In other words, caring institutions enable caring teachers, and it affords teen mothers opportunities to position themselves differently than what is offered in a traditional school.

Thus, Bourdieu's theory of practice not only helped me understand the intricacies of the pedagogical interactions I observed between the teachers and the mothering students, but it also made visible the ways in which the alternative schooling structure of RGV School enabled the teachers and the mothering students to reframe their habitus and dispositions in a way that made the observed classroom interactions and relationships possible in the first place.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Student Portraits

This study examines the pedagogical interactions of care and support that unfold between teachers and students within an alternative school located along the U.S./Mexico border. More specifically, I pay close attention to the interactions between teachers and mothering students of Mexican-origin, and how teachers and students perceive the notion of "care." I accomplished this through in-class observations over the course of one academic year in three different classrooms at an alternative school I have dubbed RGV School. I also conducted in-depth interviews with teachers and mothering students of the classrooms that I visited. The observations and interviews aimed to answer two main research questions:

1) What are the pedagogical interactions and relationships that unfold between teachers and Latina mothering students in the classroom setting of an alternative high school that houses a teen parenting program?

2) How do the Latina mothering students experience and make sense of the classroom pedagogical interactions and relationships with their teachers?

I use Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's portraiture methodology in my research design (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, 1994; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), to assemble portraits that zoom in on the detailed pedagogical strategies teachers use to connect with mothering students and assist them in continuing their education.

As discussed in chapter two (the literature review), much of the research regarding teen parents has been conducted from a deficit/pathological perspective in which the negative outcomes of teen pregnancy are repeatedly highlighted and blamed on

individual students who don't "fit in" at mainstream schools. In response to this prevalent social stigma of Latino/a teen parents, my study aligns with the recent efforts of education researchers (Wright & Davis, 2008; Smithbattle, 2007; Kalil and Ziol-Guest 2008) who are shifting the conversation to focus on the ways in which the educational system can change to accommodate the needs of teen parents (as opposed to blaming individual students for their pregnancy and pushing them out of school). Simultaneously, as a feminist research project, my intent is to humanize mothering students rather than reproduce research that perpetuates them as deviant and a lost cause in regards to attaining their educational goals and aspirations. For these reasons, portraiture is a useful methodology that enables my research to deliberately shift away from the pathological perspective that dominates the literature and mainstream societal views regarding Latino/a teen parents. This methodological shift serves as the linchpin to ensure much more complicated and nuanced portrayals of the everyday classroom lives of Latina teen mothers and their teachers at RGV School.

PORTRAITURE METHODOLOGY

Portraiture draws from case study protocol, narrative inquiry, stories, and ethnographic methods (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, 1994; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture merges art and aesthetics with empirical research to create windows into research sites. This investigative process and data analysis is an eclectic, interactive, and reflective endeavor that paints the reality of research participants through thick descriptions of events and contexts that bring the reader into the lives of the research participants (Dixson, Chapman, & Hill, 2005). In response to the gap in the literature, I

decided to use portraiture methodology to humanize Latina teen mothers at the most basic level because they are often portrayed in pathological ways in research and larger mainstream discourses (Luker, 1996). I also wanted to position them as worthy of educational investment, as well as illustrate what it looks like for educators to engage with them in supportive and caring ways. I felt portraiture was a useful methodology to accomplish these goals because it was also created for the purpose of humanizing people, places, and institutions. Rather than walking into a site asking what is wrong, the researcher enters the field asking, "What is good here?" There is a long tradition in the social sciences of documenting "pathology and disease rather than…health and resilience" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 8). This tendency is especially prominent in education research, where investigators most often document failure instead of describing examples of success. While it is important to take note of what is *not* working within schooling and education, portraiture entails a different approach in which the investigator looks for expressions of "goodness" (what is good or healthy) within the research site and among the actors in that setting. This core component of portraiture aligns with my goals of humanizing teen mothers and the educators that work with them by focusing on what is working, *why* and *how* it works, and what these findings contribute to what is known about how to best address the educational needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (a larger group in which Latina mothers are found).

However, the aim of portraiture is not to romanticize research settings and subjects; weaknesses and vulnerabilities are always present in any given context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Instead, the contradictory and counterpoint

workings of weaknesses and strengths are central to the project. The narrative aesthetic style of portraiture allows for the demonstration of the complexities and contradictions that encompass everyday life, interactions, and relationships among teachers and students in the classroom. This attention to complexities and contradictions enabled me to draw from a Chicana feminist framework to: (1) reflect on the messiness I encountered in the field, (2) engage in deep analysis, (3) and compose portraits that engaged with emerging contradictions as opportunities for the reader to imagine other possibilities for improving the pedagogical practices that are discussed. My aim was to draw the reader into the portraits to open up spaces for people to think about the education of Latina teen mothers as a worthwhile and powerful endeavor that is wrought with challenges, but not impossible. The education of Latina teen mothers is an effort that is full of possibilities, and it is deeply appreciated by the mothering students as they make the best out of the educational opportunities that are given to them. This motivation and need for educational support, exhibited by the young mothers in the portraits, can encourage readers (who could be teachers, policy makers, researchers, education practitioners, and any casual reader) to think about teen mothers as students full of promise given the right support, resources, curriculum, and pedagogical interactions. Thus, I also chose portraiture because its blend of ethnographic methods with a narrative approach enables an accessible writing style that a broad audience can understand. In order to humanize Latina teen mothers, I felt like it needed to be done through an accessible writing style that invokes feeling and imagination.

Positionality as Voice

Positionality plays a key role in creating a portrait; the product looks different depending on who writes the story. Lightfoot (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) discusses the notion of voice to make clear the hand of the protraitist in weaving and piecing together a rich tapestry of stories. The voice of the researcher is everywhere—"overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors, and echoing through the central themes" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85). Yet her voice is also subdued, restrained, and contolled to never overshadow the actors' voices. There is a paradoxical dynamic in Lightfoot's articulation of voice, it is ever present as the portraitist interacts with actors to co-construct the developng narrative, yet discplined so that the portraitist can stand on the sidelines to observe the everyday workings of a site that would otherwise be taken for granted by the actors.

Lightfoot identifies six ways that the portraitist may use voice: 1) *voice as witness*, in which the researcher expresses an outsider's stance to view patterns of action and see the whole through new eyes, 2) *voice as interpretation,* or the how the researcher is making sense of the data; 3) *voice as preoccupation*, the ways in which the portraitist's disciplinary background, theoretical stance, knowledge of the literature, and her chosen research questions makes up the framework of how she will interpret and record what she encounters; 4) *voice as autobiography* which reflects the life story of the researcher and what she brings to the inquiry—personal experiences, ideological and cultural roots, and educational history; 5) *voice discerning other voices*, the researcher focuses on the actors' voices to listen for their message and meaning; (6) finally, *voice in dialogue* which

encompasses the voices of the portraitist and the actor in dialogue and captures the emerging relationship between them.

The notion of voice in portraiture methodology enabled me to engage in self-reflexivity as I analyzed my data and pieced together the portraits of the classroom interactions I observed. In order to provide an analytical edge to the portraits I present in the next couple of chapters, I write my voice into the stories by illustrating how my interpretations and responses ultimately shaped the portraits into particular ways. I wanted to make my portraitist hand visible in order to allow the reader to also think about their own reactions and responses to the interactions I present. On the same token, I also relied on the voices of the participants to guide my painter's hand in painting the portraits. I conducted individual in-depth interviews with the five of the mothering students who were in the classes I observed, in order to understand their perceptions of the interactions I refer to in the portraits. I also interviewed the three classroom teachers I observed in order to make sense of how they understood the pedagogical interactions I observed in their classrooms. Their voices and reflections also influenced how I interpreted and wrote about the classroom and pedagogical interactions I present in the portraits. Hence, a plethora of voices from teachers and students chimed in to direct: (1) my data analysis process, (2) my self-reflexivity in regards to my positionality as a researcher, and (3) how I ultimately painted the portraits.

Extending the metaphor through jazz

Taking into account that I worked with different viewpoints (the teachers, the students, and my own), it was a difficult methodological practice for me to finally decide

how to write out portraits of *classroom interactions*. There are several illustrative examples of how portraits can be presented (Chapman, 2007; Dixson et al., 2005; H. A. Harding, 2005; Hill, 2005; S. Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Newton, 2005; T. Wright, 2010), some of which present portraits of students, others of teachers, and a few about interactions and relationships between students and educators at an institutional level. For my portraits, however, I wanted to zoom in closer on the pedagogical interactions and relationships with the classrooms, so I wanted to focus more on behaviors, dialogue, action, demeanors, body language, the movement of bodies, and the structural arrangement in the classrooms that made certain actions possible. Hence, my portraits are action-oriented, rather than descriptive of each person in the classroom. During my fieldwork, I was preoccupied with understanding why certain pedagogies, interactions, and relationships were happening. I would ask myself: Why these actions by these actors? What is driving these interactions I am seeing? And what is it about these actors that compels them to interact in these ways? What structures or systems are in place that influences these interactions? What do these interactions say about the actors and the spaces they reside?

In order to assemble portraits based on these investigative questions, one extremely helpful article provided another metaphor from which visualize and practice portraiture methodology in a way that emphasizes the action of various subjects within a particular context. Adreinne D. Dixson (2005) uses jazz to extend the portraiture metaphor into a practice that repositions the researcher into a musician sharing the stage with other musicians as they play a musical piece, yet improvise to create a one of a kind

performance that is only made possible by the connections, explorations, and call and response between the musicians on stage. In other words, I re-conceptualized myself as musician picking up the cues, interactions, and actions of other musicians (students and teachers). To visualize the student and teachers as musicians on stage enabled me to focus on their actions or performances as I observed the classrooms. As I analyzed the data, I continued to focus on the performances of the participants as actors or musicians, and in order to write the portraits, I thought of the portraits as an overall production or performance that enabled me to map out the contours of the classroom structure and even point out how the schooling structure of RGV school also made the observed classroom pedagogical interactions possible.

PORTRAITURE WITHIN THE "POSTS" PARADIGM

"Posts" perspectives, however, take issue with voice, experience, truth claims, and the epistemic privilege of the subject. For instance, from a postmodern perspective, English (2000) summons the notion of the 'politics of vision' to critique Lightfoot's portraiture methodology. English takes issue with the power the portraitist has to select the "color, shade, and light" (2000, p. 25) of the verbal portrait. Moreover, the very idea of creating a portrait invokes the problem of "truth claims" because through the creation of one story, the implication is that there is one stable truth that has been exposed through discovery. English also asserts that rather than the truth being 'discovered,' the researcher is actually constructing "*a [totalizing] grand narrative*" (2000, p. 23). Hence, the researcher is in *the* position of power because she constructs the context in which she totalizes a single narrative as truth instead of a half-truth, thereby leaving the actors and

the readers out of the process. In regards to language, English claims that portraiture does not acknowledge the "independent cosmology" (p. 24) of language that is apart from the portraitist's usage of referential signs, classifications, and symbols. Along this thread, English asserts that Lightfoot's claim that portraiture serves as a window into a single reality/story is an illusion.

I appreciate "posts" perspectives regarding truth telling, totalizing narratives, and the acknowledgement of discursive fields that constitute 'subjects in process' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). I also understand the importance of decentering the subject to make sense of what symbols, discourses, and ideologies circulate my research site, as well as the independent cosmology of language that I work from as the portraitist. However, I also privilege the epistemic knowledge of the actors I work with as I center their experiences and voices. Not only are there many different stories and multiple truths that can be told from multiple people, but also from the fragmented experiences and identities in one person.

Drawing from "posts" perspectives I intend to understand the silences and fragments of voice and experience to show the complexity of the totalized narrative, but from a feminist stance I strategically assemble these fragments in order to disrupt stigmatizing discourses and images of Latina teen mothers. Although my engagement with portraiture totalizes and centers voice and experience, I also draw from Spivak's (1988) tool of "strategic essentialism" and Sandoval's (2000) "differential consciousness" to employ multiple ways to capture not only the "essence," but also the

intricacies of the teen parents' (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995) everyday classroom lives at RGV School.

Moreover, as the portraitist I recognize that my portraits take on different forms; my final research presentation or research 'performance' (Dixson et al., 2005) is orchestrated by my conducting hand. Lightfoot stresses that the portraitist comes to the field with different theoretical perspectives, disciplinary training, and personal experiences, thereby impacting the overall picture that is put together by the portraitist (in collaboration with research participants). This is an uncomfortable thought to ponder, but a necessary one. It is essential then, for the portraitist to locate herself in the story to help the reader make sense of the data, but she cannot overshadow the actors in the setting. Revealing the portraitist's experiences, disciplinary training, theoretical stance, knowledge of the literature, and the chosen research questions provides further context for the reader to consider in their own reading of the portrait(s).

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Before I talk about my methods and data analysis, I first want to discuss my positionality as a researcher in relation to my study and the research participants whom I visited and interacted with on a daily basis for a school year. My interpretive lens is imbued by my positionality as a heterosexual, cisgender, Chicana/Tejana, working class woman, a daughter of teen parents and someone who grew up in the same area in which I conducted this study—the lower Rio Grande Valley (RGV) along the U.S./Mexico border. My lens is also colored by my experiences as a student in the area, and I have also been a high school Biology teacher in the same school from which I graduated. During

my study, I was also working as a teacher observer in multiple middle schools in the region. Hence, I have a thorough understanding of what it means to be a student and teacher in public education along the U.S./Mexico border. In this sense I have an insider view through which I was able to understand the nuances of the interactions, speech, regional expressions, and mannerisms of the teachers and students I observed in my study. However, at the same time, I occupy an outsider perspective because although I grew up in the Rio Grande Valley and I have taught there, I nonetheless left my hometown and pursued a graduate school career in central Texas and acquired new forms of capital (Bourdieu, 2001), ideas, theories, and customs that have provided me with another set of interpretive lenses to make sense of my data. I also was never a teenage mother, nor did I experience life at an alternative school growing up. Nonetheless, my feminist training in academia (particularly my use of Chicana feminisms) helps me negotiate the tensions and contradictions that arise from the overlap of my experiences with those of the teachers and students at RGV, and the ways in which I am also very different from them.

Not only is my positionality marked by experiences in different regions with a different set of cultural ways of being, but my experiences as a woman of Mexican origin have provided me with a critical consciousness that centers gender and sexuality (alongside race, culture, class and language) as my analytical framework for interpreting data. Hence, my positionality as a researcher is one that overlaps multiple worlds, locations, cultural ways of being, and theories. As Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa, 2007)articulates so clearly through her own sense of multiplicity, I embody a mestiza consciousness in

which I straddle intersecting planes of understanding and reading the world. It is this through this mode of consciousness that my interpretive lens takes form, that I have developed a sense of compassion towards my research participants to retain their humanity in my study, that also out of compassion I can hold a critical lens towards my research participants and understand their problematic stances and contradictions, and ultimately, I can analyze the data towards answering my research questions.

As a daughter of teen parents, who did not have the support in school they needed to finish their high school degrees and continue into higher education, I am also deeply committed to contributing knowledge towards the development of schools structures, teacher training, and curriculum that serves teen parents, as well as all students who struggle with schooling, in validating and caring ways.

METHODS AND ANALYSIS

The portraits in this study are based on: (1) classroom observations 3 times out of the week over the course of one scholastic year, and (2) in-depth interviews with the three teachers whose classrooms I observed, and 5 teen mothers between the ages of 15-19. I received IRB approval, from UT Austin, for my study on February 13, 2013. I obtained IRB permission after I secured approval from officials of the school district, in which RGV School is located, as well as the principal of the school, to conduct classroom observations and interview students and teachers on site (meaning at RGV School).

Methods for Recruiting Participants

To begin recruiting participants, I worked with two key figures, Mrs. Santos and Michelle Reyna (pseudonyms), in order to learn which students at RGV School were teen mothers, as well as what classes they were taking at the time. Mrs. Santos, the coordinator of the school district's teen parenting program (housed within RGV School) introduced me to several of the teen mothers at RGV School who had taken or were taking her teen parenting class at the time. Michelle, the secretary of the program, also informed me of who the teen mothers were at the school, as well as what their schedules looked like for the most part. Due to confidentiality, I was not given direct access to their class schedules, so I decided to talk to several of the teen mothers during Mrs. Santos' teen parenting class, or I approached them on an individual basis, to ask whether it was okay for them to provide me with their schedules. As I collected their schedules, I began to tally up the number of teen mothers who were in certain teachers' classrooms during each class period. I also asked the mothering students who their favorite teachers were in order to help me decide which classrooms to visit on a consistent basis for in-depth classroom observations. After several rounds of collecting schedules from the mothering students and inquiring about who their favorite teachers were and why, I decided to focus on three teachers (Mrs. Santos, Ms. Luna, and Mrs. Richardson) and their classroom interactions with their students (including mothering students) to address my first research question: *What are the pedagogical interactions and relationships that unfold between teachers and Latina mothering students in the classroom setting of an alternative high school that houses a teen parenting program?*

After approaching all three teachers and explaining my plans for classroom observations and the time frame for collecting the data, all three teachers enthusiastically agreed to me coming in to observe their classrooms and their interactions with their students. All three teachers were happy that I was committed to improving the educational and classroom lives of teen mothers. All three teachers made it clear that more must to be done "to help these girls!" They also agreed to being interviewed, and they informed me that they were eager to provide me with several of their own insights about their teaching informally and formally during the interviews.

Once I established which classrooms I would visit, I began approaching the teen mothers who were in the classes I chose to observe to ask them whether they would be interested in being interviewed for my study. Recruiting mothering students for the interviews was one of the most challenging aspects of my fieldwork because I quickly learned that the lives of several of the mothering students outside of school were filled with complexities. Some of the teen mothers moved out of town to other schools during the course of my study, while others were being home schooled after they gave birth. Due to their new responsibilities as mothers, school attendance was irregular because their babies would become ill, or they simply could not make it school because of other personal reasons outside their control. Hence, obtaining consent forms was a challenge because all of the teen mothers that were attending RGV School at the time were below the age of 18, so they had to get their consent forms signed by a legal guardian and then bring it back to school. Irregular attendance, childbirth, and parental obligations of their own made it difficult for them to turn in their consent forms. Also, because I was only

allowed to work with students and teachers on site, meaning at RGV School, I was reluctant to infringe on the parameters of what was allowed by the school district and the university IRB by visiting student homes. Eventually I was able to conduct interviews with 5 mothering students who were in the classrooms I observed. The interviews with the mothering students addressed my second research question: *How do the Latina mothering students experience and make sense of the classroom pedagogical interactions and relationships with their teachers?* I provide brief portraits of each student, as well as their perceptions of the alternative school, in the last section of this chapter.

Data Collecting and Analysis

I focused on three classrooms in order to pay close attention to the detail and nuances that unfolded in each classroom. Before I began the interviews, I observed the classrooms for about 2-3 weeks, and then analyzed the notes in order to identify preliminary themes. During this first stage of analysis, I noted different patterns I observed based on the actions of teachers and students. Some of the actions that first caught my eye were how often teachers interacted with students, and the manner in which teachers interacted with students (for example, coded as "teacher goes to student," or "student goes to teacher's desk"). These coded patterns would be grouped and after some initial analysis would result in themes. Examples of themes that emerged for teachers were: "Interactions revolving around technology"; "theatrical teaching strategies "; "moments of self-disclosure." Some examples of themes that emerged for students were: "Strategies for getting teacher's attention"; "Sharing opinions in class"; "Interactions revolving around food." These themes went through further transformations as more

patterns were noted. For example, I noted that the teachers would more readily move towards the male students, while the female students more often went to the teacher's desk to ask for help. Thus, themes would raise questions with regards to gendered patterns of behavior.

Preliminary themes were then used to construct interview protocols for the teachers and the students; I did this in order to contextualize the interview protocols and provide opportunities for the participants to shed further insight on patterns I was noticing, which were raising interesting questions I wanted to confirm with the students and teachers. This practice enabled me to gain their perspective and voice on what I observed, and subsequently modify any misconceptions or misunderstandings regarding any interactions, dynamics, or instructional practices I observed in the classrooms. I integrated a grounded theory approach in analyzing my data (Charmaz, 2006). I conducted a highly selective process of coding—starting with initial coding followed by focus coding (Charmaz, 2006)—to identify themes like those mentioned above. These themes were utilized to develop narrative sketches or memo writing. For example, one memo was about how the "theatrical teaching practices" that I often witnessed from Mrs. Santos, and in this memo, I reflected on the various modes of drama, props, and media the teacher employed to create a lasting impact on her students during her lessons. Through this theme, and the consequent memo writing, I constructed interview questions to obtain the students' perspective on Mrs. Santos' teaching style. For instance, one question was phrased, "Tell me about any lessons from Mrs. Santos that stand out for you

and why?" Through this question, I allowed the student to shed light onto how they interpret her teaching style to test my theme of her teaching as theatrical.

I conducted the interviews while I continued my classroom observations, and throughout this process I continued coding my observation notes to reveal new themes, or modify pre-existing ones, which enabled me to modify the interview protocols according to new trends and patterns. For this second level of analysis, I revised and modified initial themes to make them more specific and descriptive. For instance, I changed one theme from "Making references to students' interests" to "Using local knowledge to engage student interest," and another theme was changed from "Tending students' needs" to "Taking interest in students' personal well-being." Each interview session was tape-recorded and immediately transcribed before I conducted the subsequent interview. By immediately transcribing each interview before the next, I was able to: assess my performance as the interviewer, detect any unexpected leads, begin tracing trends or patterns, and notice any overlooked responses or points that could be probed in the future interviews. Thus, after each interview the interview guide went through numerous modifications and changes. The interview guide also went through modifications based on my ongoing practice of coding my classroom observation notes right after each observation day in order to continue modifying major themes. Any new insights based my classroom observation notes compelled me modify my interview protocols if needed. I engaged in this methodological exercise in order to explore my findings from a previous interview in more depth. Therefore, although I did not ask the exact same questions (linguistically speaking) in each interview, all of my interviews explored the same

research questions. This methodological practice also compelled me to check on the validity of the themes as I followed new leads in subsequent classroom observations to see whether certain themes held up as patterns or were sporadic moments worth a special kind of analysis.

Once all the interviews were conducted, I went through more rounds of selective coding of the interviews, as well as all my field notes. I also kept self-reflexive notes about my own positionality and relationship to the study (Lightfoot, 1997; Harding, 1988). Self-reflexivity and negotiating meaning with participants, or member checking on tentative findings, was essential in creating more collaborative research relationships. I engaged in member checking by informally discussing my notes and emerging themes with the teachers and the students between classes, as well as after school or before school. The interviews were also extremely helpful for me to check in with the participants to ask them about their interpretation of various events I witnessed, and whether I recorded observations accurately. In addition to member checking and self-reflexivity, triangulation and the ongoing coding process ensured internal validity (Merriam, 2002).

The interviews were conducted primarily in English; however, Spanish was spoken frequently in varying degrees depending on the research participant. Spanish was especially used to articulate *dichos* or *refranes* ("sayings" or "colloquialisms"), or common expressions frequently used in the Rio Grande Valley. Overall, a mixture of both English and Spanish, otherwise known as Spanglish or Tex-Mex, was spoken simultaneously throughout the some of the interviews. As a bilingual speaker well versed

with the unique blend of Spanish and English spoken in the Rio Grande Valley, I let the young participants know that they were welcome to speak any language with which they felt the most comfortable.

Theoretical framework as a set of analytical tools

Throughout the coding process discussed in the last sections, and as I further refined emerging themes, I repeatedly turned to my theoretical lens (my gender theories and Bourdieu's logics of practice) to make sense of how the pedagogical interactions I observed, and how the teachers and students understood the interactions, occurred through overlapping institutional and classroom structures that were gendered while at the same time caring and supportive. Contradictions emerged as themes took shape during my ongoing data analysis, so Chicana feminist theory was an especially helpful theoretical tool that enabled me to grapple with the overlapping discourses, structures, ideologies, and interpretive lens from the students and teachers that meshed together to create the complex pedagogical interactions and relationships I witnessed. Bourdieuian theory also enabled me to make sense of how teacher practices and teacher-student interactions that occurred in the classroom were pointing back at the alternative school's structure and culture of care in ways that enabled me to understand what made certain pedagogical interactions possible. While I utilized gender and Bourdieuian theories through which to see the data, I did not create codes that named the theories; instead I created codes that described the actions of the students and teachers. For instance, I created codes like, "student walking to teacher's desk for help" and "yelling to teacher for help" to process classroom observation notes. In this example, while these two initial

codes focused on inter*actions*, my gender theory lens allowed me to see that these two initial codes took on a gendered pattern in which boys were yelling to the teacher for help, while the girls mostly walked up to the teacher's desk to ask her for specific help on an assignment or to check their grades. This led me to focused codes that pointed out how these interactions were gendered, which eventually led me to constructing action-oriented themes with a theoretical edge (i.e. "mothering students enacting appropriate femininity by asking for help privately" and "boys enacting 'boys will be boys' discourse by demanding attention for help"). This process of gradually arriving to theoretical themes by first processing and coding teacher and student actions, then clustering these practices into themes with a theoretical edge, prevented me from prescribing or imposing themes onto my data. Instead, I allowed the data to speak for itself as I filtered it through my positionality and theoretical lens. This process ensured a grounded theory approach to my data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). For a visual aid of my data analysis process please see the Appendix in which I showcase how a few example codes were converted into themes at each level of analysis.

RGV SCHOOL AND THE TEEN PARENTING PROGRAM

My research is situated at RGV School (pseudonym) located in lower Rio Grande Valley near the U.S./Mexico border. RGV School, short for Rio Grande Valley, is an alternative school for students who are struggling academically or behaviorally in their home schools, and mothering/parenting students make up part of this population. The school district's Teen Parenting Program is housed within the school and it offers support services such as childcare, teen parenting classes, peer counseling, and a homebound

teacher. RGV School is a small campus that had about 35 teen parents enrolled at the time of my study, with a larger portion of the school made up of non-parenting students. The number of students fluctuates throughout the year because some students may attend the school for a couple of weeks to catch up on their credits to later return to their traditional/home school, or they may choose to stay and graduate at RGV school. There are two other high schools in the school district that I refer to as "traditional" or "home schools" because they are not alternative schools, and instead are structured like the average high school, and they are one of two high schools that all students at RGV School are zoned for based on where they live.

WINDOWS INTO RGV SCHOOL: PORTRAITS OF FIVE MOTHERING STUDENTS

There are five students that I interviewed who were taking the classes I observed during my fieldwork. The students vary in age and personality, yet they all come from similar working-class backgrounds with parents who either had GEDs or graduated from high school, but did not pursue higher education. Each young mother had a strong drive to finish high school and pursue higher education to some degree, ranging from plans to attend cosmetology school to pursuing medical school. All five young women told me that RGV School has been instrumental in helping them attain their long terms goals of pursuing higher education. They emphasized that the teachers at RGV School are helpful with pushing them and helping them stay on track. The young women also made clear that the teachers also guided and advised them at an emotional and motivational level. The teachers also helped them at an academic level in regards to making sure that they understood the material, as well as keeping them on track of their grades so that they

could pass their courses and obtain the credits they needed to graduate. Here is some more information for each mothering student:

"I'm a real creative person…I could draw and I'm interested in making music": Sandra the artist

Sandra is an 18-year-old mothering student of Mexican origin in the 11th grade during the time of the study. As the title states, Sandra is an artist who thrived on opportunities for artistic and creative expression. She was very crafty in her classes, especially when she had the opportunity to personalize her class assignments and projects. She was not only creative, but also keenly aware and observant of her surroundings and the people around her. When I interviewed her, she presented astute observations of the teachers and students in the classes, and she was quick to point out reasons why she felt her teachers are caring at RGV School versus her prior school. Her thoughts and reflections helped me think about how the schooling structure fostered care in the classrooms I observed. However she also had a critical take on the institution, making it clear that the school should offer electives, more field trips (especially to visit colleges and universities in other cities outside RGV), and that the teen parenting program should better advertise its services to teen fathers. Her concern was that young men, especially young fathers should learn the same information as the teen mothers in the teen parenting class.

Sandra started attending RGV school during the second semester that I began conducting my fieldwork, so she was one of the more recent students who transfer to RGV School. During the interview she claimed that she was planning to graduate high

school at RGV School. She comes from a working-class family with a mother who works as a sales associate and a father who works in residential construction. Both her parents were born in the U.S., and in regards to her parents' educational level, Sandra stated that her mother received her GED. During the time of my study, Sandra's daughter was 23 months old, and she claimed that her grandparents helped take care of her daughter while she was at school. During the interview, however, she shared that she wanted to enroll her daughter into the daycare at RGV School as soon as some paperwork was worked out with the Child Care Management Services in Texas (CCMS). Sandra and her daughter do not live with the father of her child, however, Sandra reported that she kept in contact with him.

Before Sandra became pregnant she claimed that she did not care about school as a student. She often got into trouble and rarely attended school because she "would always be so lazy, and I didn't want to get up or anything." She also felt that her old school was boring, and she socialized with other students who felt the same way about school. However, as the mother of a toddler, she stated that her perspective on schooling changed, and that she looked forward to graduating from high school so that she can move on with her life. In regards to her educational outlook, she always wanted to go to college, but she had no idea what career she wanted to pursue. According to Sandra, "a job is just something you are forced to go to everyday, and a career is doing what you love." This enabled her to realize that she has a passion for creative expression, so she decided to pursue an art degree and eventually receive a tattooing license. Her long-term goal is open up her own tattooing parlor, so her dream is to run her own business. When I

asked her what or who has mostly influenced her educational goals, Sandra responded that her daughter has been the prime influence because before she became a mother she really hated school, but now she is focused on her school work because she wants to have a productive and stable future for her and her daughter. She also highlighted that one of the three teachers I observed, Mrs. Santos, was another influential person in her life that has motivated her to strive for a brighter future than she previously imagined.

One major reason that Sandra used to not be fond of school was that she felt she was behind the rest of the students, which compelled her to disengage from class. When I asked her what she thought made a teacher caring and supportive, she replied that caring teachers take their time to work with a student one-on-one to more fully explain a lesson and clarify any misunderstandings or confusion. Sandra felt that she was not getting that from her teachers at her home school, instead, teachers seemed stressed out and overwhelmed with "stacks of papers" on their desks. To Sandra it seemed that some teachers would get upset when approached, or they quickly answered a question and moved on to the next student. At RGV School however, Sandra described the teachers as much more patient and understanding. They took their time to work with students to clarify what they didn't understand. The only class that she was in while I conducted my fieldwork was Mrs. Santos' Teen Parenting Class, but she also took Mrs. Richardson's class before I began my fieldwork, so her thoughts about Mr. Richardson will be discussed in chapter 6.

Reading the world around her: Janet the quiet and intellectual observer

Janet is 19-year-old student of Mexican origin and she was in the 12th grade during the time of my study. She had a very calm and reserved nature about her, but she always had something to say about her experiences as a student when she was in her prior traditional school and then currently at RGV School. Janet stressed that her favorite subject was reading, and indeed her love of books taught her how to read the world calmly and patiently. For Janet, it was critical to establish mutual understanding with all her teachers. She liked to establish a common ground with each teacher at RGV School in order to connect with them at personal level. This helped find a sense of belonging in her classes at RGV School, which was something she could not establish with teachers at her prior school. Like Sandra, Janet had clear ideas for what could make RGV School better. She suggested that electives should be offered that could help students prepare for different career paths. She also critiqued the notion that there was a waiting list for students to get into RGV School, so she stressed that there must be a way that the school can become bigger to accept everyone, yet retain classroom sizes so that students can get individualized attention from the teachers. She grappled with this conundrum during the interview, which I greatly appreciated because she exhibited great care for her peers and worried about their well being as much are she worried about her own.

It was Janet's first year at RGV School while I was conducting my fieldwork. Like Sandra, she also decided to stay at RGV School to graduate high school because she claimed that she had "better opportunities" at RGV School. Janet is also from a working class family; her mother is a homemaker, while her father worked two jobs in the fast

food service industry. In regards to her parents' education level, her mother graduated from college, while the father did not finish high school. Both her parents were U.S. born. Unlike Sandra, however, Janet stated that she did live with the father of her child. Her daughter was 5 months old and she attended the daycare at RGV School.

In regards to her days as a student before she became a mother, Janet shared that she was a very shy and withdrawn student. She claimed that she really wasn't "into her classes," especially math because she felt it was too difficult, and she didn't really get much help in her classes while attending her home school. She also shared that she felt like certain students got more attention than others at her old school, for instance athletes and other students who were involved in school seemed to get more attention from the teachers. She felt that it was like a "popularity" contest in terms of which students got more attention from the teacher. Since she was shy and quiet she was often overlooked. After she became a mother and transferred to RGV School, however, she noticed that teachers were more attentive to her educational and even emotional needs. Janet claimed that rather than teachers getting annoyed or "angry" if students asked questions, the teachers at RGV School were much more understanding. This helped Janet feel more at ease with asking the teachers for help. Janet also shared that the teachers at RGV School understood her particular situation as a mothering student. During the time of my fieldwork, she often looked exhausted at school because she would get little sleep at night due to her baby. During the interview she shared that some teachers allowed her to put her head down and rest if she needed it. She said this was a huge help for her so that she could get through the day. Janet was astute in noting the class size differences; she

recognized that teachers at RGV School have much smaller class sizes, which allowed the teachers and students to have more time to work with one another.

Her future plan at the time of my study was to go to college and receive the credentials to be a medical assistant. When I asked her who had been a major influence in her educational goals, Janet talked about her sister. When Janet was seven her mother left the household and then came back when she turned 14. During that time, it was Janet's sister who acted as a mother figure. The principal, Mr. Gallegos, and several of the teachers at RGV School have also been a major motivational influence because they have offered positive messages and guidance, as well as news and updated about scholarships and other opportunities to help her fund college. Janet often recommended RGV School to her peers, especially other teen mothers she knew, because RGV School offered a daycare service that provided educational services for the babies and toddlers. During the time of my study, Janet was in Mrs. Santos' and Ms. Richardson's class.

"Nothing has really changed for me, other than you know, I have a baby": Vicky the motivator

Vicky is also a Mexican American student who is 17 years of age and in the 12th grade. Vicky exhibited a tough persona in which she did not let anyone's judgments or assumptions about her as teen mother get her down. This tough yet inspirational persona led her to look for another school with teachers who matched and complemented her positive and motivating attitude. RGV School became the place in which she felt like the teachers were on the same page with her self-driven and motivated outlook of herself and her child. Vicky was hyperaware of how others interpreted her and her mothering peers,

so she enjoyed the fact that she was able to forge a sense of community with other teen mothers in the school who could collectively portray themselves in empowering ways.

Out of the five students, Vicky had been at RGV School the longest, a year and a half by the time I interviewed her. Like Janet and Sandra, Vicky planned to graduate from RGV School. Vicky comes from as single-parent working-class household. Her mother graduated from high school and works as a store manager. Her mother is U.S. born, and she also helps take care of Vicky's baby while she is at school. Vicky's daughter is 6 months old, and they do not live with the child's father, but she does keep in communication with the father.

When I asked Vicky to describe herself as a student before she became a mother, she quickly stated that she was the same type of student before and after she became a mother. She made it a point to say that her performance as a student has not changed because there is no excuse for her to do less work or change in anyway just because she has a child. Vicky was incredibly driven and focused to do her best in school and graduate so that she could move on and pursue her career as a cosmetologist. She claimed that her relationships with her teachers at her old school were good before she became pregnant, but her relationships with her teachers RGV School were even better. She claimed that teachers at RGV School "don't just ignore you." Her relationships with students at RGV School were much more meaningful to her, especially with Mrs. Santos. Like Janet, Vicky pointed out key differences between the two high schools she attended. She particularly pointed out that at RGV School several classrooms had a self-paced individual module structure. In her opinion, a major advantage of self-paced modules is

that you can go over the assignments several times if you don't get the material the first time, while in whole-classroom instruction "you go over it once then move on." She attributed the teachers' ability to spend more time with students to this classroom structural difference. She also pointed out class sizes, stating that, "you really can't blame [the teachers] when they got 20, 30 students in some classes vs. 10." Vicky understood that larger class sizes not only make it harder for teachers to give more academic attention to students, but also emotional attention, like motivating and pushing students like the teachers do at RGV School.

Vicky's future educational plans were to attend cosmetology school to learn how "to do nails and hair." When I asked her who has greatly influenced her to continue her education, she brought up her baby who has actually helped her to keep a routine and strict schedule. Vicky shared the hardships of being a young mother, but she also mentioned that her life is much more organized so that she can fulfill her duties as a mother and student. She also mentioned that the principal and the teachers at RGV School have also been a positive influence her in life. She especially pointed out Mrs. Santos' words of encouragement and motivation to not give up and not to let others bring her down. During the interview, Vicky made sure that I understood that her self-confidence has dramatically improved while she has been at RGV School, because before she attended the school, she claimed that other people's negative messages and comments often put her down and made her doubt herself. Now she says that she has to push herself no matter how hard it gets. During the time of the study, Vicky was in Mrs. Santos' and Ms. Richardson's classes.

"I like to help people…I want to save people's lives": Esperanza the future medical professional

Esperanza, a Mexican-origin student like the rest of her peers, was 16-years-old and in the 10th grade at the time of my study. Esperanza had a people-oriented approach to learning about the world around her. She liked to connect with others by sharing stories and learning important life lessons from her older peers. She explained to me that she wants to help people by working in the medical field as a doctor or a nurse. Through Mrs. Santos and Ms. Luna's classes she learned about the value of good health and nutrition, and she realized that working in the medical field could be a great way to help people in her community. Connecting with her peers and her teachers was of utmost importance for Esperanza. She made it clear to me that in order to find learning meaningful, the teachers must connect lessons to how it can help make people's lives better.

Esperanza was completing her first year at RGV School during my fieldwork. During the interview she stated that she decided to stay at RGV School to catch up on her credits and graduate high school. Also, unlike the rest of the young mothers, Esperanza's parents were not born in the U.S. In regards to her parents' occupation, her mother worked at home, and she was not sure what her dad did for a living. Both of her parents finished high school, but they did not pursue higher education. Like Vicky, Esperanza lived with the father of her child. During the time of the study, she was pregnant, so unlike the other young women, she did not already have her child.

Esperanza shared that before she became pregnant and attended RGV School, she did not get along with her teachers at her home school. Esperanza commented that she

often missed school and that “she wasn’t responsible” and she “would be bad a lot.” She also recounted that she once had a major argument with a teacher because the teacher thought Esperanza was talking when in reality it was the student sitting next to her that was talking, so Esperanza became defensive and eventually walked out of them room and slammed the door. Esperanza claimed that the teacher became angry, so she became angry too and talked back. According to Esperanza, it seemed that many teachers did not like her, and she did not like them either. She admitted that she had “an attitude.” After failing her freshman year at her home school, she decided to transfer to RGV School. At RGV School, Esperanza claimed that she got along much better with her teachers. Esperanza quickly pointed out that there were far more students at her home school, whereas at RGV School there were far less students, so the teachers at RGV School are able to provide more attention to the students.

For Esperanza, a caring and supportive teacher is someone who is “always there for me, like, ‘you shouldn’t do this, cuz this harms you or this is bad for you, and this is good for you.’” She essentially described a caring teacher as a parental figure who makes sure students know right from wrong. Esperanza felt comfortable with asking teachers for guidance and advice at RGV School. She looked onto teachers for moral lessons, as well as academic support. She also stated that the teachers at RGV School push their students to keep on track with their grades and their credits. They continuously remind students of upcoming deadlines and tell them where they stand with their grades if they don’t turn in major projects. She also liked that teachers were persistent in making sure that students understood what they were learning in class.

Before she became a mother, Esperanza claimed that she wasn't thinking about college. Instead of focusing on school, Esperanza was preoccupied with the "party life." She didn't care much for studying. After becoming pregnant, however, she quickly wanted a brighter future for her and her baby because now "there is someone who is going to depend on me." She also shared that her boyfriend, the baby's father, is also of the same mindset. He was also attending RGV School so that he could make up his credits and graduate high school (more on him later in chapter 6). Like Esperanza, he also had plans to pursue higher education. When I asked Esperanza what she wants to study, she proclaimed that she wants to become a doctor. She explained that she "wants to save people's lives." It was interesting to me that she said she wants to be a doctor during the interview because she mentioned that she was not a fan of Biology, especially because she had problems with her old biology teacher. With Ms. Luna at RGV School, however, she got along with her Biology teacher, as a result has taken greater interest in the sciences, thus sparking an a professional interest in the medical field.

Like Janet, Esperanza had recommended RGV School to her friends, especially other teen parents. During the time of my study, Esperanza was in all three teachers' classrooms, Mrs. Santos, Ms. Richardson, and Ms. Luna.

"I like being by myself more…I guess I concentrate more": Kira the focused model student

Kira, also of Mexican descent, was 17-years-old at the time my study, and she qualified as a senior close to graduation. She was an extremely focused, well organized, and goal oriented student. She was self-disciplined and she mostly kept to herself in order

to keep herself from getting distracted by her peers. She made it clear to me during the interview that she was not at RGV School to socialize, but instead focus on her studies, finish her self-paced modules as soon as possible, and graduate high school so that she may pursue her career as a nurse. Kira had a very individualistic approach to success, compared with the rest of her peers. Making money in order to support herself and her child was her main preoccupation. Due to her focused and dedicated work ethic, Kira was identified as student of the month while conducting my fieldwork. Teachers praised her diligence and commitment.

Kira was at RGV School for only a couple of months by the time I interviewed her, but she managed to obtain several credits quickly and attain her status as a senior. She had fallen behind more than a year in high school credits, because prior to attending RGV School she had dropped out of school, not because she became pregnant, but because she did not fit in her home school and she did not get along with her teachers. However, the first time she applied to RGV School, she was waitlisted, so she worked at McDonald's for a time before she was finally able to enroll into the alternative school. Like the rest of the mothering students I interviewed, Kira had no plans of returning back to her home school; instead she planned to graduate at RGV School. Both of her parents were born in the U.S., and she also reported that neither of her parents finished high school. Her mother, however, earned her GED and worked at a local gas station, while her father worked in the "oil rigs." She shared that her son is seven months old and she was also raising her nephew who was 2 years old. Kira was living with the father of her

child during the time of my study, and she enrolled her son into the daycare at RGV School.

Unfortunately, at her home school, Kira did not get along with her teachers. She explained that she constantly skipped school, she wouldn't pay attention in class, and she just wanted to hang out with her friends. After becoming a mother, however, her outlook on education changed, and she quickly developed plans to attend college and she "stopped drinking and smoking." She began concentrating on what to do in order to secure a better future for herself and her baby, so decided to attend a different kind of school that could provide the support she needed to finish high school. She explained that she was so behind with her credits, that when she first enrolled into RGV School, she was classified as a freshman, but she had worked hard in order to make-up her credits and become a senior. Kira expressed that, "it was hard, but I mean I did it for my baby." For Kira, a supportive and caring teacher provides individualized support and ensures all students understand their assignments thoroughly. At RGV School, Kira feels that she can count on the teachers for explaining the assignments and giving her the resources she needs to complete her assignments and projects quickly. She also described the teachers at the alternative school as friends because she felt like she could talk to them. Kira also noted that the self-paced modules are what allowed her teachers to give her personalized attention. She especially liked it when teachers broke down assignments into digestible parts, so that she could create a timeline for completing her assignments by a certain time. There was a sense of urgency in Kira's engagement in school, which greatly helped

explain why she was so focused and detached from her peers. During the time of my study, Kira was in Ms. Richardson's class.

Chapter 4: "I took her class as a life lesson, something I need to know": Mrs. Santos' Teen Parenting Class

What are the kinds of pedagogical interactions and strategies that work for mothering students of Mexican-origin? What does it mean for teachers to be caring and supportive for mothering students? And according to mothering students, what makes a classroom useful, relevant, and engaging? What do teen mothers needs from their teachers in order to keep up their renewed motivation in school and continue their education? This chapter regarding Mrs. Santos' teen parenting class unpacks each of these questions by showcasing her teaching style and how the mothering students responded to it. Through the voices of the mothering students, my conversations with Mrs. Santos, and the classroom observations I conducted in her class, I created portraits that illustrate the everyday pedagogical practices Mrs. Santos' employed with her students and how the students responded to her strategies. By doing this, I provide insights into the kinds of pedagogical interactions and relationships that are essential for mothering students as they work against stigma and social stereotypes about their reality as "teen parents."

SETTING UP THE CLASSROOM CONTEXT AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHAPTER

Mrs. Rebecca Santos (pseudonym) is the Program Coordinator of the school districts' Teen Parenting Program, and she also teaches the teen-parenting class that all parenting students enrolled in the program at RGV School must take. However, the teen parenting class is also open for any student at RGV School to take as an elective. The school district's teen parenting program serves students at RGV School, the other two

traditional schools in the district, as well as some middle schools. Mrs. Santos is in charge of checking on the progress of all parenting students enrolled in the program in the school district. Hence, her classroom not only serves as a space to conduct her teen-parenting class at RGV School, it is also serves as an office in which she and her secretary, Michelle Reyna (pseudonym), take care of the everyday workings of the Teen Parenting Program. Mrs. Santos also teaches her class at the other two high schools, so she drives to each school to teach her class in a borrowed space. However, these portraits do not include her time teaching at the other schools, instead I focus solely on RGV School.

In the following section, I showcase two major portraits about: (1) Mrs. Santos' teaching philosophy and approach, and (2) the kinds of pedagogical interactions and classroom dynamics that unfold in Mrs. Santos teen parenting class. Although Mrs. Santos wears many different hats as an educator and coordinator of the teen-parenting program, which can be overwhelming and draining, she manages to exhibit great energy and enthusiasm through her pedagogical style. The following portraits show how she orchestrates the flow of her classroom, the interactions that take place around her, as well as how she builds community with her students and her professional colleagues. Her community-oriented approach is a major aspect of what enabled her to connect with her mothering students and meet their educational needs.

After I present and discuss the portraits, I then switch gears by centralizing the voices of the mothering students from the interviews. In the interviews, the mothering students explained how they make sense of the pedagogical strategies Mrs. Santos

employs in her classroom, and what they found helpful, caring, and supportive about her teaching approaches. I break down Mrs. Santos teaching practices into specific strategies that the students pointed out in the interviews in order to show what works for teen parents as they continue their education. I end this chapter with the two major takeaways from the study of Mrs. Santos, her relationships to students and colleagues, and her teaching style.

IT'S ALL ABOUT TEAM WORK: A PORTRAIT OF MRS. SANTOS' TEACHING APPROACH

I simply can't write a portrait about Mrs. Santos without writing about how others are central to her teaching philosophy and approach. This first sentence sums up what it was like for me to write about Mrs. Santos' general approach to teaching and fulfilling her responsibilities as coordinator for the teen-parenting program. In this portrait, I talk about her: (1) classroom structure, (2) interactional style, (3) philosophical foundation as an educator, and (4) emphasis on collaboration and teamwork. However, I go through each of these factors with direct reference to how students, teachers, and school staff are integral in shaping these core aspects. For Mrs. Santos, her teaching persona is composed of a plethora of perspectives that enables her to connect with her students in a way that is relevant, validating, and empowering. Yet, this teaching persona is imbued with an authoritative and motherly stance that can come off as "bossy" or controlling at first, but after deeper analysis and subsequent visits, I understood this approach as her way of pushing her students to believe in themselves and never give up on their education because there are always resources and people who can be there to help them along the way. Her emphasis was to teach mothering students *how to navigate* the world around

them to attain their goals, and it is this skill set that she employed in order to fulfill her own responsibilities as an educator and program coordinator. I couldn't help but write about how others around her are central to her work, because she directly invoked how teamwork is what drives her and helps her be there for her students. I end this portrait with direct links of how Mrs. Santos' teacher portrait points out key structural and institutional aspects of RGV School that foster teamwork and collaboration among faculty and staff, and how these connections provide implications for traditional schools and teacher education programs.

For educators, classrooms can convey first impressions.

The first time I walked into Mrs. Santos' teen parenting classroom, I did not know what to expect. As I walked down the hallway, I couldn't help but think about the literature I had encountered before I began my field work about the educational obstacles mothering students often encounter in schools, like stigma perpetuated by teachers, as well as hostile classrooms that position teen mothers as unworthy of validation and support. I wondered if the classroom would have a sterile and almost clinical feel? Would it stress personal responsibility and feel oppressive? To my surprise, none of these were the case, and the way the space felt left a lasting impression in me that colored the rest of my time there: it was a space bursting with positivity, encouragement, flexibility, and a sense of safety. And I did not even get to speak to Mrs. Santos the first time I was there.

It was late in the afternoon when I walked in, close to the end of the school day, and judging by the heat in the room and a couple of handouts scattered at some of the tables, it almost seemed like the dust was settling from an active day. Only one person, a

young woman, was in the room towards the back standing near a teacher's desk. She looked very young, but at the same time old enough to be a teacher, so I went ahead and asked her if Mrs. Santos was in for the day. She looked up, her eyes glazed with confusion, and replied that she was not in for the moment because she was at another high school teaching her teen parenting class. Her perplexed look soon rubbed off on me as I squinted while trying to figure out why a teacher at RGV School would be teaching at another high school in town. While I momentarily pondered, she asked what I needed, so I snapped out of my train of thought and introduced myself to the young woman. I told her about my study and interest in observing Mrs. Santos' teen parenting class. I also explained that I wanted to learn more about the teen-parenting program. The young woman, whom later introduced herself as Michelle, the secretary of the teen parenting program, informed me that I was welcome to come back and speak directly with Mrs. Santos during her off-period. As Michelle explained Mrs. Santos' availability, I also learned from her that Mrs. Santos not only teaches the teen parenting class at the RGV alterative school, but also at the two traditional school high schools in the school district. Her schedule also included time allotted to visiting the daycare at the RGV school, tending her duties as the teen parenting program director, and networking with community organizations, local state agencies, and other local institutions to organize enrichment activities and events for the mothering students. "How does she do all of this?!" I thought to myself. I thanked Michelle for the information, and as I left the room the setup of the classroom grabbed my attention.

It had the *feel* of a classroom, yet it also felt like something out of a Twilight Zone episode, though not in a negative way. Everything was slightly shifted, which I later realized was a deliberate setup to accommodate different pedagogies, and different bodies, to serve the students better. For example, I noticed there were two teacher desks, one of which I figured was Mrs. Santos' desk and the other Michelle's desk. Both desks were right next to each other, creating a sensation that there was no clear hierarchy between faculty and staff, but more of a team effort. Also, instead of individual student desks, there were about five round tables with chairs, and pales with an assortment of markers, pencils and pens on top of each table. This reinforced the collaborative and supportive feel of the room, which stands in stark contrast to images of teachers directing pregnant students out of the classroom because a school refuses to change the small individual desks that the student no longer fits in.[1] My first impression of the classroom left me with a certain sense of festivity. As I thought about the splashes of neon pink, green, yellow, and orange around the room along with fluffy decorations, pictures of students, posters, and positive messages scattered around the room, I wondered what Mrs. Santos was going to be like as an educator—is she as colorful and festive as her classroom? What purpose did the pictures and posters of students serve? What sort of

[1] Wanda Pillow (2004) opens up her book a small excerpt drawn from her field notes regarding a pregnant teenager who struggled to fit into her school desk in her classroom. Pillow describes the desk as one "those classic school seats where the desk is attached to the chair and unmovable" (2004, p. 1). The student struggled to get into her seat as she tried different ways to slide in. As she stood by her desk to figure out another way to fit in her seat the teacher told her to sit down and that if she couldn't fit then she shouldn't be in the classroom. Pillow shares that the "girl perched sideways on the seat, the desk pressing on her side for the next 45 minutes" (2004, p.1). Pillow notes that she later learned that the young woman couldn't afford to leave the classroom because she already had 3 absences that month and if she missed another day she would be written up. Pillow ends this excerpt with the following closing words: "This was a classroom for teen mothers…and her body still didn't fit" (2004, p. 1). This excerpt came to my mind during the first

activities do they do at their tables? What sorts of interactions unfold in this colorful environment? These questions would soon be answered beginning with the first time I actually met Mrs. Santos.

Where does all that energy come from?

I began to get a clearer picture of Mrs. Santos' teaching philosophy and her pedagogical methods the next time I visited her classroom to get to know more about the teen-parenting program for the school district and the work she does with teen mothers seeking an education. She was more than excited to talk about the classroom. This enthusiasm, like her classroom setup, was a clean break from the approaches typically taken in a traditional school, where educators often see teen parenting as a problem to be dealt with, begrudgingly.[2] As I was sitting across Mrs. Santos' desk quickly scribbling notes in my journal, I almost felt like I was taking a method-acting lesson. Rather than simply explaining how she introduces new students to the teen parenting program, she had a bag of brochures, handouts, and pamphlets that she was taking out of the bag one by one as she acted out a typical scenario in which she explains how the program works to a new student. She spoke in different voices pretending to be a student, a parent, and herself. She even had her pen out and circled certain parts of the application and filled in other parts to demonstrate what the teen parent would fill out under her instruction. As amusing as it was to hear her pretend to be "a student" in order to show what sort of

[2] Work by Kaplan (1997) and Kelly (1996, 2000, 2007) shows how teachers reluctantly work with teen mothers in their classroom due to discourses of personal responsibility, blame, and faulty morality. Some teachers find it difficult to restructure their classrooms and pedagogy to suit the needs of mothering students (Pillow, 2004).

questions they typically ask, I could not help but feel a sense of care and respect from her. She would switch into character and lift her voice to a higher register to say, "So mam, what if…" or "so, mam, I can leave *mi* (my) baby at the daycare here?" Then, she would change back into her authoritative teacher voice to say, "yes, you can leave your child here at the daycare, *pero* (but) you have to make sure you fill out this paperwork with CCMS!" as she takes out the paperwork and gives further information about CCMS (Child Care Management Services in Texas) and where it is located.

After I thought about why Mrs. Santos chose to act out how she typically explains the teen parenting program to incoming teen mothers, I realized that her performance showed that she doesn't take the students (and what they know or not know) for granted. She enacted great detail as she took on different characters (student, teacher, parent) through her acting. While her skits positioned her as a figure of authority, her teacher voice was multi-dimensional; one dimension being informative about resources, the other stressing responsibility and accountability to follow-through with rules and regulations, and the other a cheerful and motivating tone that aims to pump up students and raise their self-confidence. She had realized a persona that would instill a sense of accountability in the students without being preachy or condescending. All of her voices served to break a sense of preaching or condescension, as the different voices created *perspectives* for the students while also showing that they don't have to get through the program alone, but with the help of others. The plethora of characters and voices that Mrs. Santos was emanating as she explained the program was a bit overwhelming for a researcher trying to be attentive to nuances and writing everything down. There were times when Mrs.

Santos stopped to check in with me to ask whether I was getting everything down because she knew that she talked fast and she gets excited when she talks about the program because she cares immensely about providing services to the teen parents and fulfilling their needs. In the same breath, however, she also stressed their responsibility to use the resources well so there are no excuses for them not to do well and graduate.

Her authoritative tone as she voiced her expectations resonated with me and it reminded me of my own mother when she would sternly voice her strict expectations for me when I was a student. In fact, Mrs. Santos made it clear to me that she "feels like the students' mom" as she snapped her fingers and proclaimed, "I get after them." In a later interview she shared that she is "very strict" when it comes to them knowing about how to best help themselves academically, mentally, and physically in regards to taking care of their children's bodies and their own bodies during and after their pregnancy. She explained that she "wants all her students to make it" not only in terms of pursuing higher education, but learning how to speak up for themselves and their families, how to use resources, how not to let anyone put them down, nor let anyone take advantage of them. Repeatedly during my initial meeting with Mrs. Santos and throughout my study, she told me that "they need to know" and "they must learn" because only they can ultimately live more fulfilling lives. It is precisely "the need to know" that defines the core of Mrs. Santos' authoritative and motherly stance for her students. For Mrs. Santos, students must know how to access resources, build networks of support, take care of themselves and their children, speak up for themselves, and ask for help. In exchange, Mrs. Santos also made sure to practice the skills she instilled in her students through her own teaching

practices. However, in order for the mothering students to feel entitled to knowing and practicing these skills comfortably and securely, I eventually learned that Mrs. Santos employed pedagogical strategies that motivated her students on a daily basis by validating their hardships and challenging them to rise above everyone's expectations, including their own. I also came to learn that through her pedagogical interactions with her students, she recognized their individual and collective struggles as teen mothers, thereby working against stigma often associated with teen mothers.

But where does all her energy come from? From the first day I set foot into her class to the rest of my time visiting her and her students, one thing was clear to me: working with parenting students is *not* easy. For instance, where does she get the energy to collect so many informational brochures and pamphlets for her students and maintain contacts with various constituents throughout the community like CCMS and regional community health centers? How does she get the energy to oversee the maintenance of a daycare at the school, while at the same time traveling to other highs schools to teach classes and check on student's progress at those schools? How does she have the energy to take on so many personas to motivate and encourage her students? In fact, when does she find the time to plan and teach classes at all? Is this some natural talent? Does her energy come from some inner core that every educator should have if they are to meet the needs of Latina teen mothers? It wasn't until later on that I learned that it was not all innate energy or some natural talent that she possessed that made this work possible, but rather energy and abilities that flowed from a nexus of support between teachers, staff, and students at RGV School. Such a support network was facilitated by a school structure

that promoted collaboration, understanding, and unity in coming together to meet the needs of the students at RGV School, including the mothering students. I understood that the values and skills she instilled in her students are not simply abstract skills that exist in some vacuum of what makes a good student or mother, instead she is passing on a set of deeply contextualized skills that has enabled her to do the difficult and demanding work required by the different hats she wears. Mrs. Santos has learned though experience that in order to provide the care and support teen mothers need to continue their education, she must do it in collaboration with others. She needs the support and help of other educators at RGV School, as well as helpful feedback from her students, to continue her own learning experiences of how to best meet the needs of teen mothers.

"It takes a team to make the teen parenting program work!": Mrs. Santos recognizes collective support.

I can recall one morning that I arrived early to the classroom and waited for Mrs. Santos outside her classroom door. As I waited by the door, I saw her approaching at a glacial pace carrying bags. When she finally arrived, she dug into her purse, then let out a half-groan, " Oh no!" I asked her, "Did you lose your keys?" She looked up straight at me and said "yes," but I noticed she was not really looking at me but instead she was looking straight through me as she tried to remember where she left them. In a failed attempt to comfort her, I exclaimed, "sounds like something I would do!" She then dug into her purse again and found some keys, but then she said, "Oh wait, the door is already open," as she twisted the doorknob to open the door. At this point I was thoroughly confused. Maybe she remembered that she left it open on purpose? As we walked in the

room she tells me in an exasperated voice, unlike what I am used to hearing from her, "Ganiva, I am overwhelmed!" Her eyes began to water as she confessed her insecurities as a teacher and program coordinator, and it became clear: Mrs. Santos, Rebecca, is a human being who is trying her best, but like all humans, she has a breaking point.

Mrs. Santos disclosed to me that she is not sure if the students are learning, or if she is being too hard on them, or whether is she is doing enough as an educator. She sounded convinced that she could do better, but in a therapeutic act of self-care, she soon dug through her emails in her computer to read a message she recently sent out to the faculty at RGV School. In the email she thanked the faculty and staff for being supportive of the teen parents and the teen-parenting program. As Mrs. Santos read the email out loud, she looked up at me momentarily to emphasize the following line: "It takes a team to make the teen parenting program work!" Mrs. Santos further explained that she simply couldn't do her job without the help of several teachers, key staff members (including custodians), and the principal of the school. In the email she thanked teachers like Mr. Fregoso for picking up baby car seats from the store for the teen mothers in the program. She briefly stopped reading the email to explain the backstory to the baby car seats. In order to save on delivery costs and to make the most out of funds donated to the program, Mrs. Santos was trying to figure out how many baby car seats could fit in her small car and how many trips she would have to take to and from the store. Mr. Fregoso ran into her in the parking lot as she stared at her car deep in thought, and upon learning about the baby car seats, he kindly offered his aid with picking up the seats with his truck. He explained to Mrs. Santos that it is important to help with the car seats because many of

the mothering students have explained to him that they can't make it to school sometimes because they do not have a car seat for their baby to be transported safely to be dropped off at a daycare or with a relative. Mr. Fregoso stated, "If helping with the car seats will help [the students] get to school, then I am here to help." After telling me the story, Mrs. Santos turned to me with a look of amazement and said, "Can you believe that!?" I replied, "That's the first time I have ever heard about that sort of teamwork at a school!"

I was genuinely impressed. My experience in schools as an educator and field supervisor for pre-service teachers in traditional schools has revolved around the notion that every teacher is in charge of their own classroom and their own kids. The extent for teamwork mostly concerned team planning and some sharing of classroom materials. At RGV School, however, the family-like structure and culture of the school fosters further collaboration not only among the teachers, but also the staff and the administration at the school. This became especially evident as Mrs. Santos continued reading the email in which she thanked her own staff, including her secretary Michelle and the women in the daycare center, for helping her make the teen parenting program work. Mrs. Santos once again stopped reading the email to look over at Michelle's desk. As she focused on Michelle's desk, Mrs. Santos expressed that Michelle was more than a secretary to her; she was her partner in running the program, which further explained why their desks were right next to each other. For Mrs. Santos, it's not just Michelle's work that matters, but also her expertise and even her presence. In fact, at the time, Michelle was on maternity leave for a couple of days and I could tell that her absence was tough for Mrs. Santos because she seemed a little lonely without her companion. After Mrs. Santos

finished reading her email to me, she suddenly switched to her authoritative tone and said, “I am not glorifying the program!” With my latest reading on the importance of practicing mindfulness in the back of my mind, I took a therapeutic stance and replied, “It is what it is.” She put her guard back down and returned to her softer voice as she looked back at her computer and repeated, “It is what it is, it is what it is…” a couple of times. I noticed that I also began to take on a supportive role for Mrs. Santos as a result of her expressing her vulnerabilities, insecurities, and confessions of how much she relies on others to in order “to be there for the girls.” I was swallowed up by the supportive and caring structure that Mrs. Santos so clearly pointed out to me, and I certainly didn’t mind at all.

At first, it was difficult for me to understand what compelled her to read that email out loud to me, but I soon realized that she was getting through the emotions of feeling overwhelmed with an impossible task of wearing many hats as a teacher and program coordinator for the teen parenting program. She was trying to get herself in the right mindset so that she could receive her students with great energy and enthusiasm that the parenting students have grown used to having every morning when they walk into her class.

Although Mrs. Santos was aware of the conglomerate of needs that rest on her shoulders from her students and their children, she was also mindful of the support she has received at RGV School. How to ask for help and to utilize resources are skills that Mrs. Santos has mastered and it is a set of skills that she often instills in her students. Later on, as I reflected on our conversation, I realized that is important for teachers to

practice such skills so that they don't feel alone and isolated. Thinking back on my own experiences as an educator in traditional high schools, I remember taking on too much on my own and witnessing colleagues experience "teacher burnout" from also depending on their own individual efforts. Mrs. Santos' email pointed out that it is simply too much for teachers to take on the responsibility of all of their students on their own shoulders alone. After great thought, analysis, and consideration I eventually made the connection that teacher-training programs should teach collective practices of support, the use of resources, and strategies for seeking help if they are to create realistic expectations for teachers. This is a lesson on the importance of building community between educators and staff in schools, so that teachers feel much more capable of meeting the needs of youth that have much more demanding lives outside of school than the average student. Mrs. Santos made it clear that personal (home) and public (school) student needs have no boundaries for many of the teachers at RGV School. For instance, baby car seats were just as important as having a pencil to do classwork. Student needs are student needs no matter the context. For Mrs. Santos and her colleagues to attend the needs of their students meant removing obstacles for them to complete their education, especially for "the girls" (mothering students) that Mrs. Santos cares for deeply. An individual and collective strength emerged out of Mrs. Santos' moment of vulnerability. At RGV School, teachers, staff, and the administrators must take care of one another in order to build a supportive foundation for their students and to meet their particular needs.

PEDAGOGIES OF CONNECTION: A PORTRAIT OF MRS. SANTOS' CLASS AND HER MOTHERING STUDENTS

Parenting teens and pregnant students often experience overt marginalization and stigmatization, which can hurt their self-esteem and motivation. How can a teacher reach a class primarily composed of parenting students? Mrs. Santos faced this challenge through various strategies that included connecting with students through music, creating a flexible environment where the struggles of mothering students were recognized, and using community values to instill in the students a sense of worth and responsibility. Mrs. Santos also developed a keen eye for identifying what is urgent for her students to know and talk about in class. In this way, she made sure to talk about topics that the students thought were important in her teen-parenting class even though some topics were sensitive and uncomfortable.

The following portrait focuses on the particular classroom dynamics that often unfold in Mrs. Santos' teen-parenting classroom. More specifically, I focus on a particular lesson about teen dating violence. Through this lesson, I attend to the specific pedagogical strategies that Mrs. Santos employs in her classroom to engage mothering students in ways that fosters deep personal connection. Personal disclosure is one major strategy that exemplifies Mrs. Santos' pedagogies of connection as a means for fostering questioning, reflection, and discussion for the teen mothers. I end this portrait with my own reflections of how Mrs. Santos' pedagogies of connection can open honest discussions that can problematize taken for granted notions of dating violence, while at the same time limiting further transformative dialogue about how dating violence is a gendered, heteronormative, and even a racialized social problem. Yet these same

limitations offer windows of opportunity for educators to learn about the value of using pedagogies of connection by exploring uncomfortable yet urgent topics that are relevant to students.

Motivating students that others have given up on.

The classroom setup, with its colors, textures, warmth, and sounds, which I found out included music, blended with Mrs. Santos' multi-dimensional teaching style to achieve particular goals, key among them the motivation of students who may have lost all educational aspirations prior to coming to RGV School.[3] Right before the final bell rang to mark the beginning of 2nd period class, Mrs. Santos raised the volume of one of the songs that was already playing on her computer as she exclaims, "This is you guys right?! You're a champion, you've been pushed around, but you're gonna stand up right?!" One of her more shy and quiet parenting students, Janet yelled, "Yes!!" It surprised me that Janet agreed loudly and openly because she is usually a little more reserved and picky about when she speaks. I guess she got caught in the high-energy wave that was radiating from Mrs. Santos as she sat at her desk by her computer. The tune that she was playing was "Roar" by Katy Perry, a motivational song from a popular pop star. The particular lyrics that Mrs. Santos was referring to were as follows: "I got the eye of the tiger, a fighter, dancing through the fire 'cause I am a champion and you're gonna hear me roar louder, louder than a lion!" Students continued to walk into the

[3] The mothering students I interviewed disclosed that they were not comfortable in their home schools, and they did not have productive relationships with their teachers. For most of the young women, they explained that they would had given up or were close to giving up on their education in their prior schools. For more information read Chapter 3.

classroom as the music was playing; by the time class started all students were seated at a round table.

During second period, Mrs. Santos had two sets of students: 1) the co-op students, none of which are parenting students, and 2) the parenting students who were taking the teen parenting class. The co-op students were those who worked in the daycare at RGV School and they also attended the school. During class, the co-op students mostly kept to themselves as they quietly worked on paperwork and other matters related to their jobs. Although they mostly kept to themselves, there were times that they stopped what they were doing to look up and sometimes chime in on what Mrs. Santos was teaching for the day. The teen parents usually sat together in their area, while the co-op students sat together in their own table along with laptops (provided by the school), as well as paperwork for their job. All the students were young women between the ages of 15 and 19.

For Mrs. Santos, starting out the class with motivating pop-music and words of encouragement is typical and even expected by the students. Mrs. Santos continued talking about the song, "is it true or false, the song fits for ya'll? I'll print out the lyrics." Janet chimed in and said, "It will be our graduation song." Another student Vicky, one of the more vocal students in the class, interrupted the conversation about the song to say that she did not get enough sleep the night before. Like Vicky, many of the mothering students usually came into class dragging their feet from exhaustion because they usually stayed up all night with their babies, or they overworked themselves with chores and schoolwork the day before. In response to students' usual exhaustion, Mrs. Santos often

started the class with music, words of encouragement, high-fiving the students when they came in, or simply asking the students how they were doing. It was impressive to me how hard Mrs. Santos worked to get the students riled up even though she often came in at the beginning of school dragging her own feet trying to get herself together before second period started. Mrs. Santos needed to be on top of her game in order to be sensitive to the students' needs, some of which were very delicate. Especially today, because the students were about to continue their lesson about a topic that is rarely talked about in schools, yet is pervasive in their lives. The discussion of sensitive topics especially warranted warm and motivational connection with the students in order to create a productive space for dialogue.

Teen Dating Violence: This is serious business.

Today was the second day students talked about teen dating violence, a topic that is not actually in the "Successful Teen Parenting" course curriculum[4] that Mrs. Santos adopted for the class. Three years ago Mrs. Santos decided to integrate dating violence into the curriculum because of the specific experiences of violence she witnessed in her students' relationships. In an interview, Mrs. Santos explained, "I have boyfriends coming to [RGV School], they didn't even [attend] here, but the teen parent worked here. And [one guy] was violent in the parking lot, and I said no, no, no, no, no! *(Index finger up signaling disapproval)* Stop this right away! And so I said you know what? This is more prominent now than it was before." On the first day the students began learning

[4] The curriculum that Mrs. Santos was using for her teen parenting class was drawn from the *Successful Parenting for School-Age Parents Reference Book* that was developed by the Curriculum Center for Family and Consumer Sciences at Texas Tech University.

about dating violence, Mrs. Santos began the lesson through an in-depth discussion of what constitutes an abusive or unhealthy relationship. The teacher used handouts from various resources like *Wellness Reproductions & Publishing* group (a psychology based resource), brochures from local community health centers, and a power point presentation so that the students could learn about the signs of power, manipulation, and control in an unhealthy relationship. They learned about the characteristics of physical, verbal, and psychological abuse, and the mothering students were also given information about where to go for help if they found themselves in an abusive relationship. Today, however, the students were getting ready to take a quiz about what they learned the day before.

Before they took any quiz, though, Mrs. Santos made sure that she reviewed the material with the students. Her mini-review session with the students was much like a coaching session where she asked students questions, but she made the students responsible of answering the questions themselves by looking through their notes and the supplemental material that was provided. As the students were being coached before they took their quiz, one of the students said that she was cold, so Mrs. Santos gave her one of the scrubs that the co-op students use while they work at the daycare. Then, one of the youngest students in the class named Darlene exclaimed that if someone was to tell her that he/she was in an abusive relationship that she would tell that person to come to her house for protection. When Darlene said this, I could tell that the students were taking this very seriously. Other students agreed with Darlene as they looked up at her and nodded as they busily sifted through their materials and looked for key terms and definitions about the cycle of violence and red flags for what constitutes an unhealthy

relationship. They keenly concentrated on Mrs. Santos' questions as they jotted down notes and pointed out any details their peers may have missed on their own notes. It felt like students not only wanted to make sure that they knew pertinent information about how to recognize dating violence and where to go to get help, but they wanted to make sure that their peers sitting next to them were also clear on this information. A growing fervor of paper shuffling, quiet but steady conversation among students, the sound of clicking pens, and the Mrs. Santos' coaching voice indicated this was serious business.

After the coaching session, the students were told to put their things away and they began taking their test. As the students quickly finished their quiz, Mrs. Santos picked up the quizzes and set them next to my laptop. She pointed to the last question, a bonus question that asked whether the students knew anyone in an abusive relationship. Every single paper said yes. I looked up at her as we exchanged looks of dismay and subtly shook our heads. I empathized with Mrs. Santos' reaction, but in my mind, I was not the least bit surprised given my awareness of sexual violence through my work as a gender and sexuality studies researcher. Given my growing familiarity with Mrs. Santos' teaching style, I knew that Mrs. Santos was ready to respond to this knowledge she received from her students through the bonus question by further illuminating the urgency for ending dating violence through her performative teaching practices and use of media.

Once the students were finished with their quizzes it was time to begin a movie entitled, "No One Would Tell." The movie came out in 1996 and is based on the true story of sixteen-year-old Stacey Collins caught up in an abusive relationship with the star

athlete of her school, Bobby Tennison. The relationship quickly escalated from manipulation and control to murder. Bobby eventually kills Stephanie, and throughout the entire relationship, others had witnessed the red flags of their unhealthy relationship, yet no one came forward to report their concerns—hence the title, "No One Would Tell." After Mrs. Santos summarized the plot of the movie to the students, she explained that they were going to analyze the home life and take notes of Stacey and Bobby's relationship dynamics. She also explained to the students that she would be pausing the movie to check in on what they were thinking, as well as explain their observations and analysis. After, the movie started, one of the students, Amelia, said she had seen it. As Mrs. Santos passed out handouts with questions about the movie she replied, "Oh really?" The students were reminded not to have their cellphones, but that didn't seem to be a big issue since all the parenting students were watching intently as the movie began with a scene of the young couple interacting.

While the movie played, Mrs. Santos took the opportunity to check on the co-op students as they worked on their independent work at one of the other round tables. The teen parenting students continued to watch the movie with their heads propped up with their hands, head tilted, and facing forward with their chairs positioned straight towards the screen. Eventually, Mrs. Santos stopped the movie and asked, "What have you seen so far?" The students provided responses regarding Stacey living in a single-parent household with her mother since the father was gone. Stacey was also having problems with her mother because they seemed to have some tension. Mrs. Santos clapped and said, "Write that down!" Mrs. Santos then asked about Bobby. One of the students

replied, “He’s nice.” Mrs. Santos said, “Yes!” After they answered a couple of more questions Mrs. Santos exclaimed, “You know what is amazing, you’re analyzing, this is college stuff! Now listen to what the coach is telling the team, you’ll think you won’t believe what he says!” The movie began playing again, and the scene with the wrestling coach comes up in which he yelled to the young men to exhibit aggression and control at all times when they wrestle their opponent. Mrs. Santos paused the movie and she asked what the coach was talking about. One student replied, “ He said to be aggressive.” Another student jumped in, “ To hurt them!” Mrs. Santos tied their responses together and responded, “To take power and control!” Mrs. Santos elaborated to explain that the students were learning about control and domination. This pattern of pausing the movie and probing the students continued throughout the movie. At one point Mrs. Santos began writing some of the responses students were giving on the whiteboard. For instance, she made a t-chart with Stacey written on one side and Bobby written on the other side. Under Bobby were three bullet points: nice, smart/friendly, and athlete. On the other side under Stacey was one bullet point: insecure.

As the movie progressed, Mrs. Santos walked them through moments in which the dynamics of the relationship fostered dependency on Stacey’s part towards Bobby. Finally, a rough scene was shown in which Bobby pushes Stacey against the wall. Mrs. Santos stopped the movie, and asked: what happened? One of the co-op students replied, “He got jealous!” Pretending to be shocked Mrs. Santos replied, “But what happened? I thought he was a nice guy!” Mrs. Santos and the students then proceeded to talk about the cycle of violence and revisit the signs of the cycle they had learned about previously. As

the end of the class approached, the movie was stopped and Mrs. Santos told the students (including the co-op students), " I love you guys! I hope you are learning!" As the students collected their belongings, one of the students began to talk about a friend's abusive relationship. Mrs. Santos told the students that these things happen and she does not want them to think they are normal. After the bell rang and the students were out, Mrs. Santos turned to me to say, "They're very intelligent, did you see that they already know the cycle of violence? Man I'm amazed…I'm impressed!"

The movie about an abusive teenage relationship is one example of how Mrs. Santos uses the characters in movies as proxies for people the parenting students may know or even as the students themselves. In other words, Mrs. Santos finds ways to invoke situations and scenarios that the students can relate to and connect at a personal level. Some students may be up for talking about their own situations or the situations of others they know out loud in class, or personally with Mrs. Santos one on one outside of class time, but some students are reluctant to openly discuss anything that is personal. Movies, as well as YouTube videos work well for opening class discussion in which the students can practice their critical thinking and analytical skills openly because they are not talking about anyone in particular that they know, but instead they are talking about a character in the movie, so they feel more comfortable to be honest and impartial.

In addition to YouTube videos and movies, Mrs. Santos has also used news reports, documentaries, informative videos, and television shows for other sensitive topics like STDs (particularly AIDS) and child abuse. Although students mostly talk about the characters or real life people in this media to unravel the complexity of the

topics, Mrs. Santos was also aware of the opportunities for students to disclose their own personal experiences or at least ask questions based on their experiences. However, the final day that Mrs. Santos showed the "No One Would Tell" movie, I was not expecting her to disclose her own personal story about being in an abusive relationship. I learned that she not only relied on media and fictional characters to connect with students and open opportunities for engaging discussion, she was also willing to foster deeper connections with her students by exposing her own personal stories that would resonate with the students.

A pedagogy of connection forged through a self-disclosure story

The morning that Mrs. Santos decided to tell her own story, the students came in the classroom full of energy as they joked and smiled at one another and to Mrs. Santos. After some discussion and announcements, Mrs. Santos played the final part of the movie.

The last part of the movie included Stacey's murder by her abusive boyfriend Bobby, following the aftermath of the murder in which the mother was shown crying and a trial was held against Bobby. The cheerfulness of the students subsided and the mothering students and the co-op students looked up at the screen intently, and one of the teen parents cried quietly. Mrs. Santos offered a tissue to the student who was crying as another student said she loved the movie. I understood the student's comment about her loving the movie as an indication that she appreciated how the movie was upfront about the reality of abuse. When the movie ended, Mrs. Santos exclaimed, "You guys do not deserve to get hit, is it her fault?" One of the students interestingly said, "Yes!" Another

student said, “I would not go with him to the river,” which is ultimately where Stacey’s throat was slit by Bobby. Mrs. Santos then proceeded to show a picture of Amy Carnevale, the real person whom the character Stacey was based on in the movie. Amy Carnevale was a 14-year-old school cheerleader. The students looked up at the picture and gasped in sympathy. She then showed a picture of Jamie Fuller, the real person Bobby was based on in the movie. Jamie Fuller was a 16-year-old school athlete. Mrs. Santos commented that he looked like a regular guy. She then proceeded to say that, “you learn from experience, someone needs to talk to you and show you all this. I think teen violence is pretty big.”

Mrs. Santos then proceeded to show a picture of a teenage Latina in a cheerleading outfit from one of the traditional high schools in the school district. After she paused and looked up at the picture, Mrs. Santos asked the students, “Why am I showing a picture of myself when I was teenager?” None of the students said a word as they stared at the image. Mrs. Santos then proceeded to tell her story:

> “When I was 14 and 15 years old, I was in an abusive relationship. I was in love; I would do anything for this guy. He would hit me. I knew what it was like to cover up bruises. What was I thinking? I was so pretty. I did not deserve this. My friends would say that I was stupid.”

It struck me, and quite frankly bothered me that Mrs. Santos mentioned that she was pretty right before she said she did not deserve this. Does prettiness matter in regards to whether a woman deserves to be hit? Why does pretty matter at all? I was not quite sure if she was imitating what students tend to say when they react to her story. When it

comes to gender violence, I've heard girls and young women say, "but you're so pretty, I can't believe that would happen to you!" So perhaps Mrs. Santos was trying to integrate what others have said as shock value. At the moment, I chose to focus on the fact the she was indeed telling her own story and I paid attention to how these particular students would react. Mrs. Santos also disclosed to the students that she too came from a single-parent household in which her mother worked extremely hard for her and her brother. Mrs. Santos contemplated whether she got into an abusive relationship to begin with because her father wasn't there. Again, I was struck by her rationale behind her experience, this time I was uneasy that she pointed out her upbringing in a single-parent household as a factor that pushed her into an abusive relationship. What kind of message would that send to several of her students who were raising their child(ren) on their own? What about her ethic of collaboration and teamwork and her positionality of being another parental figure for her students? Aren't there other possibilities for family arrangement other than the nuclear family? Again, I decided to stop my train of thought and refocus on the moment and keep observing. Later I would find the time to reflect on my moments of discomfort to make sense of what I observed through an analytical eye. At that moment attention to her story and the students' reactions mattered.

Mrs. Santos continued to explain that one night her boyfriend snapped and he hit her so hard that it knocked her unconscious and rather than helping her, he left her outside in the rain. Hours later she woke up and returned home with a "busted mouth." When her mom saw her, she cried and got down on her knees to pray for her daughter. As Mrs. Santos told the story, the students listened intently. I could tell it was not easy to

disclose her own personal story because she told her story in broken segments with no real sequence to the scattered events. It was almost as if Mrs. Santos was re-living rather than re-telling the moments. She was honest with her ponderings of why and how she ended up in an abusive relationship. It was a bit troubling for me that she was searching for answers in the fact that she did not grow up with a father and her mother's time was limited because of working outside the home. Teen dating violence is made up of complicated gendered power dynamics that Mrs. Santos herself tried to unpack in a prior class.

As she grappled with her experience and she jumbled up her words, I realized, however, that my moments of discomfort came from her own unresolved understanding of what happened to her, as well as her insecurities from being in the spotlight in disclosing her own personal story. Her performances among the students usually convey confidence, reassurance, and knowledge. This time she was vulnerable and unsure, yet honest and genuine. Upon realizing this during her story, a feeling of appreciation came over me and calmed down my radical feminist side as I looked at the students and noticed that they too appreciated Mrs. Santos' risky move to disclose her story. In my interviews with the mothering students, they shared that prior to coming to RGV School, they never had any real meaningful connection with any of their teachers, and so Mrs. Santos' self-disclosure must have seemed like a bold and radical move for the students. Her radical message enabled all of us (the mothering students and me) to understand that we are not the only ones with vulnerabilities and insecurities.

Mrs. Santos told the students that she got out of the abusive relationship when she was 15 years old. She then exclaimed: “I could have become pregnant, but I didn’t, you don’t deserve this, you should be treated like a princess! My husband treats me like a queen. This can happen to anyone at all levels, it does not discriminate. Guys also go through it, but they do not report it, because of machismo and stubbornness.” I wondered if she meant masculinity? One of the students responded, “Everyone should be treated like a queen!” Mrs. Santos then moved on to show a video her parenting students made the year before for Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month. Students were still in disbelief at this point, then finally one of the students asked, “Mam, really this happened to you?” Mrs. Santos answers, “Neta!” (Mexican slang that means, “Yeah!”). The students were shocked to know about her experience, but still managed to focus on the video that was beginning to play. The video featured young men and women teen parents who were acting out different examples of abuse in relationships, like hitting, pushing yelling, shaming, etc. The only audio for the video was an emotional song that complemented the serious situations that were being acted out by the students. It was interesting to see that both the young men and women were acting out the roles of victim/survivor and perpetrator. Even some of the young women were pushing and shoving their male partners to show the dramatic effects of relationship violence. However, what I also found interesting was that when one of the female students pushed her male counterpart into the lockers, some of the young women giggled. I wondered if the young women were reacting to the fact that they don’t usually see a woman pushing a man in media, or if they thought the acting was funny.

By the end of the 10-15 minute video, Mrs. Santos told the students that they "have to hold themselves in high esteem" and their partner should treat them as such. It was interesting to see the student's reactions throughout the movie because they shifted away from shock and disbelief into a plethora of comments and reactions that ranged from being angry about the existence of dating violence to a bit of giggling about the some of the acting the students exhibited in the video. Some of the students even pointed out that others were laughing. Mrs. Santos responded that some people process difficult scenes and situations differently and people are at different maturity levels. Whether they were giggling or not, several of the students disclosed that many of the scenes they saw acted by the students have happened to them. One of the co-op students suggested that they should make their own video.

A few minutes before class ended Mrs. Santos went over some of the questions on the students' worksheet to make sure they got all the responses. One of the questions on the handout asked what the character in the movie, Stacey, thought about her self. One of the students responded, "She would look in the mirror and say it is hopeless." Mrs. Santos brought this question up to reemphasize that the young women in her class must have high self-esteem. Again, Mrs. Santos emphasized that the young women need to feel comfortable in their own skin, love themselves and their babies, and they should always stand up for themselves.

At the end of class one of the students said she was tired because she had to wake up earlier that day for her baby. Another student asked Mrs. Santos if she had any kids, and she responded by saying she has many kids as she signaled to everyone in the class

indicating that the students are her kids. Mrs. Santos reminded everyone of an upcoming progress report deadline and she had all students turn in their well-organized folders with their work for the week. Mrs. Santos asked what everyone thought of the lesson, and Darlene replied that she liked the lesson. After the bell rang and the students walked out, Mrs. Santos turned to me and said, "Look what I'm teaching them, how to analyze the cycle of violence. In what other class does this happen?" Mrs. Santos then brought up that some of the students said it was Stacey's fault that she was hurt, but Mrs. Santos emphasized that it is something that "needs to be taught."

Understanding contradictions through a complicated and emotional topic

As I looked at Mrs. Santos and then turned to the door as the last student walked out and said goodbye, I thought about Mrs. Santos' comment that dating violence must be taught as a means to validate their experiences. It was clear to Mrs. Santos that the students know plenty about teen dating violence, however, they seem to have a tendency to hyper-individualize the problem as the victim/survivor's fault for not stopping it even though they also understand that it is more complicated. Moreover, on the one hand, Mrs. Santos also had the tendency to individualize the problem at the level of the romantic relationship between a heterosexual adolescent couples or localize the problem as stemming from the home. On the other hand, she also pointed out a larger culture that fosters aggression and control among young men when she paused the movie after the coach instilled a poignant lesson about power to the wrestling team. There were several contradictions that emerged throughout the lesson from the teacher and the students in which personal responsibility was stressed, but also a collective responsibility to

recognize signs of abuse that may be happening to people they know and to report incidents of abuse.

I also noticed that although the movie about a young woman being abused by her boyfriend was deeply touching and troubling for the mothering students, the mini-movie made by their peers in which violence against men was shown seemed to be amusing to the young women. This suggested that their understanding of violence against men was not as serious as violence against women. Mrs. Santos tried to raise the point that men also go through abuse because they under report it due to "machismo or stubbornness." Invoking machismo without unpacking the term undermined Mrs. Santos' message by reinscribing a common stereotype about Mexican-origin men as inevitable (stubborn) perpetrators of violence against their "submissive" female counterparts. In regards to young women commonly portrayed as passive potential victims, I also wondered why there wasn't much discussion about the ways in which Stacey tried to stop the pattern of abuse that was happening to her throughout the movie. There were several occasions in which she spoke up about her suspicions and experiences, however the ways in which her friends and mother reacted to her reinforced gendered norms of women giving others (including their boyfriends) the benefit of the doubt and locating blame in themselves. Stacey's lack of self-esteem when she looked in the mirror and said she was hopeless did not necessarily signify an individual fault, but rather it was a reflection of a larger set of social norms and discourses that compelled her to doubt herself and become vulnerable to abuse. I wondered what it would look like if the students had continued working on Stacey's half of the t-chart Mrs. Santos had drawn on the white board the day before. As I

looked at the white board with Stacey's half of the t-chart filled in with the word, "insecure," I wondered what the mothering students would point out if they were asked to identify the ways in which Stacey enacted agency to stop the situation. Would a deeper conversation about Stacey enable the mothering students to think about their own agency?

After pondering all of these contradictions I encountered throughout the class discussion, I also began to think about how rare it is to hear about any teacher talk about gender violence so openly with students. In fact, this was the first time I had ever witnessed such a lesson in school! Although there were several contradictions that indicated limitations for further critical probing of teen dating violence as a social problem, these limitations are also windows of opportunity for further transformative dialogue that can disrupt gendered and racial power dynamics. Teaching about sexual violence is a deeply personal, painful, and uncomfortable topic to discuss, but Mrs. Santos embraced the challenge. She responded to a critical need that her students conveyed through their own experiences, and this was a pedagogical practice of connection that was relevant and urgent for the young mothers. This classroom experience enabled them to start thinking about the topic as a collective group, and they left the room knowing that they were entitled to stopping it in their own lives and in the lives of others. As Mrs. Santos articulated, such difficult topics "need to be taught" and what I witnessed in her class is one example of how educators can move into uncomfortable territory to create powerful learning experiences and practice pedagogies of connection with students. Mrs. Santos wished me a great day as she dashed out the

door to make her way out of the school and into her car to drive to the next school and teach her lesson about dating violence all over again. She was going to disclose her story two more times because there was a second traditional high school she visited. I thought to myself, "Wow, she's going do it all over again, I can only imagine how exhausted she's going to be at the end of the day when she has to make her way back RGV School to check on the daycare." I waved at her from the back of the room as I wrote down my last reflection in my notebook stemming from one of my favorite Chicana feminist readings by Sofia Villenas and Melissa Moreno (2001) "contradictions are sites for opportunity."

"I BUILD THEM UP…": LESSONS, STRATEGIES, AND THE PURPOSES OF MRS. SANTOS' WORK

The two portraits I have presented illustrate the complexities and nuances of everyday classroom life in Mrs. Santos' Teen Parenting Class. The portraits show that Mrs. Santos' work as a teacher and program coordinator is overwhelming and it requires a high level of energy in order to keep the mothering students motivated. In order to maintain her positive and motivating attitude, Mrs. Santos depended on a support network of colleagues fostered by the structure of RGV School. At this point, I turn to the interviews with Mrs. Santos and four of the mothering students, Esperanza, Sandra, Vicky, and Janet, to point out specific strategies and lessons that Mrs. Santos employed for her students. I especially bring forth what the mothering students shared in the interviews in order to show how they interpret the everyday pedagogical interactions they experienced with Mrs. Santos. It is through their voices that I piece together key aspects

of Mrs. Santos' teaching that the young women identified as caring and supportive. In addition to the students' perspectives, I also entwine some classroom observations, along with explanations from Mrs. Santos, to show the purpose behind several of her pedagogical strategies that the students identified as helpful.

I begin by providing the purpose behind Mrs. Santos' self-disclosure story during the dating violence lesson. I offer explanations for why she chose to share her story, and I also explore the students' perspectives of the lesson and her self-disclosure. I then move onto other lessons and strategies Mrs. Santos employed to provide meaningful experiences for her students. Throughout this segment of teacher strategies and student perspectives, I show how Mrs. Santos' "builds up" student engagement, trust, community, and learning opportunities that her students deeply appreciate.

Embracing Discomfort and Taboo Topics to Connect with Students

As I mentioned in the last portrait, I had never witnessed a teacher and her students speak so openly about a sensitive topic like teen dating violence, and I especially had never witnessed a teacher tell her own personal story of abuse. What compelled Mrs. Santos to tell her story? I understood that she wanted to address teen dating violence with her students because she had witnessed her students go through abusive situations with their boyfriends, but was there another purpose behind her self-disclosure?

When I had the opportunity to interview Mrs. Santos, I gently nudged her to tell me about what compelled her to disclose her personal experience with dating violence. She struggled a little to collect her thoughts for this loaded question. After a couple of "ums" and repetition, she explained that when she first started her career as a teen

parenting coordinator/educator she noticed that many of the young women she worked with were going through abuse in their romantic relationships. Mrs. Santos remarked, "You know, they would talk about it, and you know I was so moved by their courageousness, and I'm 33 and it happened when I was a teenager, and you know I really never came out with my story." She further explained that she comes from a household where you don't talk about these problems: "No se hablan de esas cosas (You don't talk about those things). You know what I'm talking about, those things." Mrs. Santos further disclosed that she comes from a single-parent household, her mom was "always working," so she was raised by her grandmother. Because her grandmother raised her, she pointed out that there was a generational gap in regards to what topics were appropriate for discussion, and sex as well as relationship problems were some of the topics that were not ok to discuss. Mrs. Santos also established that she didn't have a strong relationship with her mom since she was often absent, and her father left the household when she was young. Given her family background, Mrs. Santos commented, "I'm surprised I did not become a teen parent myself."

After listening to her family background I understood that she wanted to make it clear that she did not learn how to talk about sensitive and taboo topics until she began to work as an educator for the teen-parenting program. Mrs. Santos shared that when you're trying to build relationships and trust with your students "you learn so much!" She explained that she didn't go through a pregnancy as a teen, so she wanted to figure out, "What makes us the same." In other words, she searched for ways to connect with her students at an intimate and personal level. For Mrs. Santos, culturally relevant teaching

practices necessitate intimate connections with her students so that they can identify with her as a person. So when Mrs. Santos learned about her students' unfortunate experiences with violence in their relationships, it invoked her own experiences and she realized that she had something in common with them that she can discuss for educational and community building purposes. Mrs. Santos also positioned her students as her teachers because she let their knowledge and experiences guide the ways in which she modified the teen-parenting curriculum to better fit the needs of the mothering students. Although she did not learn how to talk openly about sensitive topics at home, like dating violence, her interactions and her experiences with her students enabled her to begin learning how to approach a taboo topic like teen dating violence.

However, Mrs. Santos recounted that sharing her own story about dating violence involved a long process of providing the tools to makes sense of why dating violence happens:

> "These girls were really struggling, they're going through what I went through, but they have a child involved. And so slowly and surely I started sharing with them, but I have plan to reveal it. You know what I mean? Because I don't come out and say I was a victim of teen dating violence, I don't come out right away. So we talk about it. I build them up, and after I tell them what I went through, *(she acts out student's reaction by gasping)* it's a shock! You know? It's kind of like Wow!"

In the portrait about the teen dating violence lesson, Mrs. Santos used various pedagogical methods to "build up" the collective knowledge of the students by allowing

them to share their experiences, ideas. She also utilized media, educational resources from online psychology based websites, and brochures to provide a framework to make sense of teen dating violence.

Another goal of Mrs. Santos' story was to show that the students can overcome obstacles, such as abuse, and grow up to be "healthy" and "productive" adults. In the interview, she expressed that she wants her students to know that they can live "through these obstacles of life!" She further established, "I guess that's part of why I've been talking about my story."

The Value of Personal and Intimate Connections: Student Perspectives of Mrs. Santos' Pedagogical Practices

What was the effectiveness of Mrs. Santos' energy, positivity, encouragement, and personal disclosure? When I asked 19-year-old Janet if she felt that Ms. Santos is caring and supportive, Janet responded "yes" because Mrs. Santos teaches about urgent topics that are relevant and helpful for them in their daily lives. Janet recounted, "When we were going over a chapter about relationships she told us that if we experience abuse that we should speak up, and then she told us that she went through that too!" When I asked her what she thought about Mrs. Santos' personal story, Janet exclaimed, "I was like wow! Cuz you would think like somebody that went through that would be damaged, but then like she became a teacher and is helping others." To Janet, witnessing a professional, well-adjusted adult talking about her experience with relationship violence made a positive impact, because she saw first hand that people do survive hardships and can overcome difficult obstacles with success. Janet also noted that a successful survivor

of abuse is a person who is helping others in some way, so someone who is genuinely caring is a person who can convert painful and negative experiences into teaching opportunities for others to hear, and in turn become motivated to overcome their own hardships.

Janet also indicated that Mrs. Santos' disclosure of her own personal life events fostered a classroom environment in which she is comfortable with disclosing her own personal life. Janet told me about the time the students began talking about their own family backgrounds in class, many of her peers recounted how their fathers walked out on their families. Janet, on the other hand, volunteered to talk about her own family in which her mother was the one who walked out on the family and household. Her father continued to be the provider, while her older sister became the main caregiver. At the beginning of my interview with Janet, she told me about her earlier experiences in other schools in which she was a very shy and quiet student, but after being in Mrs. Santos' class, she became much more comfortable speaking out loud in her classes, asking questions, and even sharing her own personal experiences. Because Mrs. Santos has worked as a teen parenting teacher for many years, Janet claimed that she understood their individual stories. Janet explained that Mrs. Santos not only listened to her students' problems and gave them advice, but she also provided valuable information about resources such as Medicaid and other services they can access.

Like Janet, 18-year-old Sandra, also talked about her trust in Mrs. Santos' advice and guidance during our interview. When I asked her whether she thought Mrs. Santos was caring and supportive, she responded, "Yeah, because she talks to me, and she's been

there when I need somebody to talk to, and she'll be like, 'if you ever have questions or concerns, or if you just need somebody to talk to I'm here.'" Sandra continued to tell me that she has talked about personal matters with Mrs. Santos regarding her child and her child's father outside of class time. In regards to the dating violence lesson and discussion, Sandra shared that she appreciated the learning experience because she also went through emotional and verbal abuse in her relationship, so it hit home for her. She further recounted that when she approached Mrs. Santos about her own experiences with her ex-boyfriend, Mrs. Santos comforted her and let her know that everything will be okay and many people go through these unfortunate experiences. Mrs. Santos also gave her advice on how to keep herself and her child safe by providing information about various community resources and other contact information for safety measures. I asked Sandra whether there was anything else Mrs. Santos can do to be more supportive, she simply responded, "I don't know, because I just like her the way she is." Sandra further added, "Just, uh, the way she puts herself out there, I know I can feel comfortable around her and I can just be myself around her." Hence, Sandra developed a trusting and engaging relationship with Mrs. Santos.

In an interview with 17-year-old Vicky, I asked her how she got along with Mrs. Santos, and she enthusiastically responded, "I like her, she is cool. I've actually gone to her to talk about personal stuff. She's a great person to go to for advice." Much like Sandra, Vicky also liked to talk to Mrs. Santos one-on-one outside of class time about personal matters, like problems at home. In another interview with 16-year-old Esperanza, she also confirmed that Mrs. Santos helps her students tremendously. She

said, “Like if we have a problem and we told her, I think she would help us out and tell us what we can do. She’s there with us.” Esperanza interpreted Mrs. Santos as caring because she not only does she listen to her students, but she also provides practical advice, information, and resources to actually address their problem. Students not only trust Mrs. Santos to hear them out, but they even rely on her for solutions.

The Establishment of Mutual Respect between Teacher and Mothering Students

Although the students I interviewed unanimously agreed that Mrs. Santos is someone who they trust at a personal level and they disclose many personal matters with her, there is still a sharp boundary of “mutual respect” between teacher and student. Mrs. Santos clearly articulated this when she stated, “…even when you graduate, you know, it’s Mrs. [Santos], I’m not your friend, I’m your teacher, (sighs) but at the same time they see me as Mrs. [Santos] she is so cool (laughs)!” The type of relationship dynamic that Mrs. Santos establishes with her students is one that is a professional mentorship, not a friendship. Mrs. Santos explained, “They get to know me and I get to know them. When they have problems I empathize with them, but at the same time I try to motivate them, because we all have our, you know, dealings, and stuff like that.” In other words, Mrs. Santos made sure to listen to her students and validate their hardships, but she also motivated and challenged them to finds ways to overcome life’s obstacles. Mrs. Santos understood the value of enabling students to come to her and talk through their problems because it not only helped them at an emotional level, but it also helped them to clear their minds and make room and time for academic and parental responsibilities. Mrs. Santos made this point when she said, “Imagine if we didn’t talk about [hardships] at all,

how would [they] be feeling the rest of the day? [They] wouldn't be able to concentrate on math or social studies, or whatever classes they're in…these girls deserve to be listened to!"

During my interview with Sandra, when I asked her what her relationship with Mrs. Santos was like, she confirmed Mrs. Santos' effort of maintaining clear teacher-student boundaries. Sandra explained, "When it comes to her teaching and me being a student, yeah, we'll take our place in that." However, Sandra also confirmed Mrs. Santos' effort in connecting with the students when she further elaborated, "but like whenever she's done with the lesson, we joke around and stuff like that, she's known me since I was pregnant which was in 2012, so we've kind of built our relationship within those years." Hence, Mrs. Santos was able to build intimate and personal connections with her students as a professional mentor in which students felt that they could relate to her yet at the same time recognize her an authority figure. Mrs. Santos worked hard to position herself as a parental and authority figure that the young mothers could utilize as a resource, advisor, and mentor. Much like the othermothering roles discussed in black feminist literature (Auguste, 2011; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; P. H. Collins, 1991; hooks, 2000). Mrs. Santos often took on the mannerisms and persona of a mother or aunt to take on the role of an extended family member for each teen mother.

In the following section, I move away from personal disclosure stories, advice, and mentorship relationships to discuss what the mothering students thought about Mrs. Santos' class and her teaching style. More specifically, the young mothers explained what they found valuable about their learning experiences in Mrs. Santos' class and what kinds

of pedagogical interactions they found helpful academically. I also sprinkle more commentary from Mrs. Santos' interview to shed further light onto the purposes behind her lessons and strategies.

"I've learned so much in her class…": Students find Teen Parenting Class Useful and Practical

One of Mrs. Santos' biggest concerns was whether the students were learning. Several times after class and during informal conversations around the school, Mrs. Santos would ask me whether I thought the students were learning, or whether the material she was teaching was too much for the students. For instance, during one our conversations in the school parking lot, we spoke about how her class went that day. The topic for the lesson was STDs, so she presented a power point that included several pictures of what actual STD infections look like on real bodies. Mrs. Santos found these pictures online from medical websites to not only ensure that the students were receiving accurate information on what various STDs look like, but she also wanted to shock students in order to "grab" their attention and engage them into the lesson. During our informal conversation, Mrs. Santos expressed that learning about STDs can be overwhelming because there are so many diseases to memorize, so Mrs. Santos used "shocking" pictures to imprint the difference between the diseases in their minds. She wanted to make sure that the students could more easily remember the names and characteristics of each disease. Mrs. Santos also expressed that she wanted the students to walk away with a strong sense of urgency to use protection and take care of themselves. She expressed that it's important to "be realistic with them… they need to know." Even

though she was deliberate about her strategies, she also reflected on whether there could be "too much information."

According to her students, however, there is never enough information. Sandra, for instance, shared that she took Mrs. Santos's class multiple times because she found the information she learned in her class useful:

> "Her class is really helpful, I've learned so much from that class, like I don't think I would've ever known a lot of stuff if I wouldn't have taken that [teen parenting] class. I've taken that class, uh, many times. When I was pregnant and then after I was pregnant, and then again my tenth grade year, and then again this year."

Many of her students have taken her class more than once and those who were taking the class for the first time, never seemed to have enough time to ask more questions about difficult topics like child abuse, dating violence, self-esteem, family communication, birth defects, and legal matters regarding paternity. In fact, during the lesson about STDs, I noticed that the while the lesson was filled with technical and medical language and graphic pictures, it was also broken up by several gasps, reactions, questions, excitement, and conversations between Mrs. Santos and the students. To wrap up our conversation about how the class went, I shared my observations with Mrs. Santos to reassure her that whether the graphic medical pictures of STDs were "too much" or not, the students were nonetheless engaged with the lesson.

Although Mrs. Santos feared that perhaps she was giving being too upfront about the difficult realities of sex, romantic relationships, family dynamics, and other complex topics related to her class, the students were clear that they appreciated her honesty and

the wealth of information she provided. When I asked Vicky what she thought about Mrs. Santos' class, she responded, "When I'm in her class and she's speaking I'm just like Wow! Like you know, who would have known that, or that's crazy, you're just shocked by the stuff that she teaches you…If I can take her class over and over I think I would cuz you learn something new every day…I don't think there's anything I didn't like in that class." She also added that she's learned a lot about "how girls' and guys' bodies work." Similarly, when I asked Esperanza to tell me how she felt about Mrs. Santos' class she responded:

> Esperanza: I'm actually learning! Like I learn something new everyday.
>
> GR: Is that something you felt in others' classroom?
>
> Esperanza: No, like some classes I would learn something, but then I'd forget that same day. But this [class], I just think about it, and I think about what can happen to people and stuff. Like if I was in that situation, like what would I do?

Esperanza specifically brought up the videos and movies that Mrs. Santos used in the class to talk about how effective they were with helping her see the consequences that unfold when characters make certain choices.

For Mrs. Santos, media and other technology (such as social media) are central to her teaching strategies. During an interview, Mrs. Santos commented:

> "You've seen the book (the curriculum)…it is very black and white, and there are no pictures, there's no video, and with all the technology today, these students are like, entertain me, show me, show me, something different!"

The curriculum that Mrs. Santos referred to above is the *Successful Parenting for School-Age Parents Reference Book* that was developed by the Curriculum Center for Family and Consumer Sciences at Texas Tech University. Mrs. Santos was well aware of young people's active engagement with technology and social media, so she found several ways to use technology in her lessons. Yet, Mrs. Santos also lamented that the school does not provide access to technology such as iPads to download useful apps, like tracking fetal development. Nonetheless, she was able to take advantage of some of the students' smartphones to motivate them to spread awareness about child abuse and dating violence on social media like their Facebook accounts. However, her use of power points with striking medical pictures, movies, and social media were not the only in ways in which she built lasting pedagogical impressions on her students. She also enacted a dramatic teaching style, with grandiose effects, which enabled her to emphasize important points in her lessons and ensure student engagement.

"All the World's a stage" and so is the Classroom

Words that are fit to describe Mrs. Santos' teaching style are: dynamic, energetic, theatrical, dramatic, and comical. When she taught, it was definitely like a theatrical performance in which she acted out various scenarios using multiple props like a baby doll, a timer, chair, and anything else she could get her hands on while she taught. This not only enabled her to fully illustrate her point, but it also shocked students and kept them on the edge of their seats. As Sandra explained to me, "she puts character into her lessons when she teaches…She'll joke around and then she'll ask questions, and she'll sometimes play dumb like, 'Oh! Really I didn't know that!'"

For instance, during one her discussions regarding child abuse, she used a dummy that resembled a baby to demonstrate ways of coping with a crying baby. As she held the baby, she modeled different actions that can either hurt or comfort the baby. In accordance to the break in hierarchy that the classroom setup and her relationship to the students demonstrated earlier in this chapter, her teaching gets the students involved as she treats them as experts in their own right. For example, one of her demonstrations included her shaking the baby as she said, "It's ok everyone, if I do this, it will calm the baby down." Many of the students yelled "No!" So Mrs. Santos "played dumb" (as Sandra mentioned) while she proclaimed, "What? No, really? Then what should I do?" After the students offered different suggestions, Mrs. Santos responded, "Oh really? Like this?" One student suggested that she can ask someone else to hold the baby for a little while so that she can take a break from the crying, so Mrs. Santos obeyed and handed the baby doll to another student and acted out the scenario: "Here Elena, you take the baby for a little bit so that I can take a little break." Then Mrs. Santos broke character and asked her, "Now what are you gonna do with the baby?" Instead of going through the list of strategies listed on the handout she passed out to the students, Mrs. Santos had students use their prior knowledge. During our interview, Mrs. Santos explained that it is critical for her students to share their ideas if they have other kinds of information that can add to discussion: "They open up my eyes! I don't know everything, so I want them to tell me what they know!"

According to the students, through her highly dynamic and energetic teaching style, Mrs. Santos achieved a classroom environment in which students were engaged and

felt free to speak openly in class. In an interview, Sandra commented that Mrs. Santos: "Takes time to ask us questions and listens to us, and she gives everybody a chance to talk." Many of the students also noted that her theatrical teaching style was helpful for them to learn new information, like Vicky articulated: "She'll act it out, or she'll show pictures and go into detail." Esperanza also pointed out that she liked how Mrs. Santos showed several examples of what to do and what not to do. Many of students made it clear that part of what makes a teacher caring and supportive is that she uses different strategies to ensure student learning. They appreciate that Mrs. Santos' active teaching style is helpful for them to stay engaged and fully understand the lesson. Throughout my classroom observations of Mrs. Santos' class there was hardly a moment in which she stayed in one place for longer than 3 minutes. Her use of various technology, media, props, and acting methods pushed her to move around the room as the students' eyes and heads try to keep up with her quick movements and grand gestures. As Esperanza commented during an interview: "You can tell she loves what she's doing."

"She Still Sees a Future in Us": Mothering Students Gain Confidence

The last major point I want to emphasize about the impact of Mrs. Santos' pedagogical interactions and strategies is that the mothering students recognized that Mrs. Santos treated them like humans with potential, rather than static stereotypes with no future. Their motivation to continue their education was also fueled by their sense of belonging in Mrs. Santos' classroom. When I interviewed the four mothering students that were taking Mrs. Santos' class during the classroom observations, I learned that before they attended RGV School and took Mrs. Santos' teen parenting class, they were

either extremely shy, indifferent, and even defiant towards schooling and their prior teachers. However, after observing them in Mrs. Santos' class, I noticed that they were vocal, engaged, and curious. For instance, Esperanza strongly disliked her teachers at her home school and she felt insecure and inadequate in her classes. Esperanza shared that it seemed that everyone around her understood what was being taught in her classes, but she didn't. She admitted that her self-confidence was low, but in Mrs. Santos' class she felt much more confident because she not only understood what was being taught, she she also had opportunities to contribute to classroom discussions. She felt like her presence made a difference in the class because she could share her ideas and thoughts openly, so there was a sense of ownership that Esperanza took on in the classroom leading her to feel "useful," "proud" and "mature."

What Esperanza also appreciated about Mrs. Santos was that she believed in the mothering students despite the obstacles they face at teen parents. Esperanza articulated:

> She thinks we can still do it even though we're young and having kids. She won't see it like some other people like, 'Oh! She's pregnant, she ruined her life!' I really don't know people like her that believe that we can still go to college. Some people are like, 'Ooh this is going to be hard for you' and stuff instead of giving you encouragement. She still sees a future in us. That's the thing I like."

Vicky also expressed that being at RGV School, and especially after taking Mrs. Santos' class, she also felt much more confident in herself and hopeful for her future:

> Being in her class has made me more open-minded and think better about things…not let people put me down…keep pushing myself…before I would let

little things get to me. Things are different, and I block everybody out, you know, focus on me and my daughter.

At first, I was not sure what Vicky meant when she said that she "blocks everybody out," but as the interview progressed I understood that she learned to block out negative messages because Mrs. Santos often tells the students not to worry "about what other people say." During one of our informal conversations, Mrs. Santos told me that she is "very protective of the girls and what they hear" because she has heard many negative comments aimed at her students and other teen parents. For instance, she told me about a time she did a presentation about the Teen Parenting program at a parenting conference at a local community college in town. Some people in the audience gave positive feedback, while others were critical of the need for a teen-parenting program in the school district. Many people in the audience thought that teen parents should not have accommodations and services because it "glamorizes" teen pregnancy and may even motivate other students to become teen parents as well. During our conversation, Mrs. Santos stared off in the distance as she admitted that negative comments sometimes discourage her, but then she looked back at me as she said, "But you know, if my girls can do it, I can do it too." In other words, Mrs. Santos looks up to her own students to find strength and continue what she does, because the young women live with negative comments all the time as teen mothers, yet they continue to do their best in the midst of several limitations. As long as her students keep marching forward, Mrs. Santos marches along with them to provide them with whatever support they need to continue their struggle.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RELEVANT LITERATURE

There is extensive literature that urges teachers to become sensitive and responsive to historically disenfranchised students, their parents, and their communities (Delgado-Bernal, 2012; Gay 2002, 2010; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings 1998, 2009; Sólorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Yosso 2005, 2002; Weiner, 2006). Culturally relevant and responsive teaching (Delgado-Bernal; 2002; Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2002, 2005), as well as literature from critical race theorists in education, urges teachers to get to know the surrounding community and implement students' knowledge as a resource to create transformational change in the classroom (Gay, 2002, 2010; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Teachers are often asked to check their privilege and their assumptions, and stay away from static stereotypes and deficit perspectives (Aronson et al., 2002; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Weiner, 2006). However, this literature, as helpful and invaluable as it is in teacher training programs and education scholarship, can be overwhelming to teachers who face a highly isolating schooling system in the midst of a high stakes testing regime. As I discussed in the first portrait earlier in the chapter, teachers may feel isolated in their own individual efforts to meet the needs of their students in a high stakes accountability system that tends to dehumanize and disenfranchise both teachers and students (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Burke et al., 1996; Farber, 1991; Kyriacou, 1987; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). If teachers often experience burn-out in U.S. schools, then what does it mean to urge teachers to practice culturally relevant and responsive teaching in schools that do not value community-oriented practices? While it is important to create a support network for

students in which teachers can position themselves as part of the surrounding community in the lives of students, how can critical pedagogies and culturally relevant/responsive teaching help teachers build support networks for themselves? How can teacher education programs provide teachers with the tools to build community among their colleagues in order to meet the needs of students? And most importantly, what are some practical ways that teachers can pedagogically connect with students in ways that enables them to draw further strength and support from students? In other words, how can teachers connect with students in ways that not only meets the needs of the students, but also refills the energy and enthusiasm of the teacher to continue doing demanding work with historically marginalized students like teen mothers?

The teacher in this chapter reveals that there are ways of connecting to students and engaging with them in ways that recharges the teachers' motivation and energy. After a close analysis of Mrs. Santos' pedagogy and style, there are two main findings I want to emphasize in this case: (1) Mrs. Santos is able to successfully connect with students and engage them in their classwork by reconfiguring her role from "just a teacher," to a mentor and even parental figure; and (2) she can only engage in a reconfiguring of her role and her relationship to students if she also practices self-care within a school structure that nurtures the teacher and makes her feel supported.

It's not enough for teachers to just have academic knowledge of different cultures and socioeconomic classes. Any real connection and engagement with students has to stem from the type of relationship a teacher can develop with them. Limiting the role to just "instructor" can create boundaries that get in the way of teacher/student connection.

But in this case, Mrs. Santos demonstrates that she has power and agency over the role she can play in the students' lives. It is important to note that she is acting from a place of empowerment when she becomes a mentor and even a parental figure to many of the students. This new role allows her to become humanized in the eyes of students as she reveals her vulnerabilities, like self-disclosure stories.

By exposing her vulnerabilities, Mrs. Santos was able to build intimate and personal relationships with students in ways that opened up plenty of opportunities for the mothering students to approach her for "motherly" guidance and actionable advice via access to community resources. Hence, Mrs. Santos embodied a parental/mentorship role as an othermother for the mothering students. She saw herself as an extension of the network of resources the young women could access as they worked to overcome their obstacles as "teen mothers." However, in order to personally connect with the students as an othermother, Mrs. Santos had to embrace sensitive topics in her class that were urgent and relevant to the lives of her students. Traversing unfamiliar pedagogical territory in the form of self-disclosure and discussion about the complex realities of the young women's lives in the class, like sexual violence, opened the door to intimate conversations wrought with vulnerability (and contradictions which I discuss in more detail in the Conclusion chapter). Mrs. Santos may not know the students' families and their communities intimately, but in her classroom she was able to pedagogically engage with her students in ways that enabled her to build a highly personal sense of community with the mothering teens. Like she mentioned to me, she was trying to find "what makes us the same?" What this shows is that teachers may not be able to connect with all of the

students' communities and understand all of the students' challenges and backgrounds, but one aspect they do have control over is what role they will play in their students' lives. This is achieved through work that: (1) forges intimate relationships with students, and (2) recognizes the complexities and difficult realties the mothering students face.

It is also important to point out that Mrs. Santos' personal story about her experience with dating violence is reminiscent of testimonio, a story-telling tradition coming from Latin America that reveals personal experiences and events about social injustice (Menchú & Burgos-Debray, 1984; Santiago, 1998; Villegas, 1974). Testimonio has become a transformative venue in which feminists of color, especially Chicana feminists, not only speak out about their experiences of oppression to point out injustice, but to also produce knowledge about how our social world can be changed for the betterment of humanity (Méndez-Negrete, 2006; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983). This storytelling practice and knowledge production, or "theory in the flesh" (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983), not only implicates the storyteller but also the audience who become witnesses of the narrative. Bakhtin (1990) has explained that testimonios start out with an audience who witnesses the story of someone else's oppression and suffering and then that same audience is summoned to also share their own experiences of injustice, thereby inciting a chain reaction of communal connection and knowing that can prompt social change.

For instance, Josie Méndez-Negrete (2006) shared her story of sexual violence and abuse in her family in order to prompt awareness of the issue and inspire others to break the silence and tell their own stories. Her hope is to bring about change and end the

pervasive existence of sexual violence across all communities. Similar to Mendez-Negrete (2006), Mrs. Santos also wants to incite social change and end teen dating violence by telling her own story and letting her mothering students know that they are not alone, and they are not to be blamed for their experiences. Mrs. Santos' testimonio showed that her experiences of gender violence, as well as the experiences of her mothering students, are part of a larger social problem that must be addressed. Mrs. Santos' testimonio also created a space for collaborative healing. Although Mrs. Santos was re-living her trauma while she re-told her story, the students as her witnesses connected with her pain and understood her purposeful message. As Mendez-Negrete writes, healing takes place as memory, evoked in all of the sensations of the body, is invoked to affirm one's feelings and take control of those feelings, thus breaking a cycle of power, which tends to manifest as silence. Mendez-Negrete then writes that even though people share painful testimonies from different walks of like, "the wounding-in-common we share provides the base for others to understand the process of healing" (p. 196).

As I explained earlier in this chapter, several of the teen mothers were deeply moved by Mrs. Santos' story because they not only appreciated her genuine honestly, but they also learned that regardless of any trauma they experience, they too can become agents of their own lives and tell their stories as a source of strength, inspiration, and change. In this sense, Mrs. Santos' testimonio serves as an example of a healing pedagogy in which the teacher and students collaborate in a process of storytelling that is both validating and a means for personal and community change.

Chapter 5: "Very demanding, very mean teacher…but as they get to know me…": Ms. Luna's 8th Grade Science and Biology Classes

This chapter explores the complexities and contradictions that arose while I observed two of Ms. Luna's science classes: her fourth period Biology class, composed of students who were mostly between the ages of 15-17, and her sixth period 8th grade science class, with students who were 14-years-old or younger (middle school age). Both of her classes were composed of both male and female students, as well as parenting and non-parenting students. Contrary to Mrs. Santos' classroom, which was set up with round tables in a large opened space with colorful posters and pictures of students and past events, Ms. Luna's class had rows of desks facing the screen on the front side of the room with few decorations on the walls, except the periodic table of elements and other science related posters. Behind the desks, in the back area of the room, there were lab tables complete with sinks. The lab tables, however, were never used while I was observing Ms. Luna's class. The bare essentials were present in the room for students to be able to fulfill their academic duties. For Ms. Luna, her class reflected structure, symmetry, and order, which made sense in light of the fast-paced science curricula she was aiming to cover in each of her classes. Ms. Luna taught was teaching three different courses at the time: Biology, 8th grade science, and IPC (Integrated Physics and Chemistry). At RGV School, Ms. Luna was classified as an Accelerated Program teacher, so she was expected to teach a full year's worth of science curricula in her classes in one semester. The compression of curriculum, the time crunch she was facing, and the unique demands of the student

population at RGV School (who were pushed out of their traditional home schools), placed much pressure on Ms. Luna.

This general context lays the groundwork for how Ms. Luna managed the pressure in the midst of interacting with her students. Although the school supported teachers as they worked with their students, the accelerated program also placed difficult demands on teachers like Ms. Luna. Mrs. Santos (and Mrs. Richardson in the next chapter), however, did not face accelerated curriculum. Instead, they basked in flexibility and the freedom to make changes to what they taught. Hence, Ms. Luna's teaching position imbued her pedagogical interactions and strategies in her classroom. In the chapter, I will show how a state of urgency, as well as personal factors in Ms. Luna's life, compelled her to adopt a teaching style marked by order, time management, and clearly defined agendas. I will also show that despite her inclination to be "strict," she nonetheless exhibited care through incorporating flexibility. For instance, she provided students with plenty of opportunities for make-up work. She understood that her students tended to go through extenuating circumstances, like parenting responsibilities, which demanded special attention and accommodations. Also, although she commonly enacted a "mean" teacher persona to keep her students from "wasting time," the students nonetheless managed to connect with her in meaningful ways that eluded her. In the following portrait I begin to show the contradictions that unfold in her classroom as she works to instill order and impersonal interactions, yet the students engineer clever ways to probe Ms. Luna and build a sense of community in what may *seem* like a rigid classroom space.

"WHY ARE YOU SO MEAN!": A PORTRAIT OF HOW STUDENTS PLAYFULLY ENGAGE WITH MS. LUNA

Even before I turned the corner of the hallway to walk into Ms. Luna's 8th grade science class for my first classroom observation, I could hear what seemed like a multitude of overlapping young voices in the midst of laughter and banter. Before I walked into the room—judging by the competing flow of voices and sounds that were flowing out of the classroom—I thought there were over 15 students situated in the room. However, as I walked through the front door and scoped out the back of the room for a place to sit, I was surprised to only see 9 students sitting in desks set up in rows facing the screen at the front of the classroom nearby the entrance. While getting past the students who were sitting in desks located front and center of the classroom, through my peripheral vision I noticed that maybe one or two students turned their heads to look at me. The rest of the students were either focused on the screen, the teacher who stood next to the screen, or at one another as side comments were exchanged between peers. Even the science teachers' attention seemed glued onto the students; I'm not sure whether she even noticed me coming into room. After settling into one of the stools by one of the lab tables in the back of the room, I took out my laptop to begin taking notes. I looked up at the students in front of me and I noticed that I was not the only one with a computer. Some of the students seemed to be finishing up a different activity on their laptops (more on this laptop activity in a later section) and were putting them away at the side of the room, but even this side activity did not slow them down from actively participating in the whole group lesson.

The high energy and heat produced by squirming bodies and excited hands shooting up in the air radiated outward from the cluster of students to all sides of the room, which eventually compelled me to remove my sweater in the back of the room as the temperature grew warmer. Ms. Luna's voice interjected the sea of young voices as she periodically paused an animation video that was playing on the screen to answer and ask student questions, as well as redirect student behavior. I consistently heard Ms. Luna repeat phrases like, "pay attention," "turn around," and "what's so funny?" Although students periodically disengaged from the lesson to turn to one another and crack jokes, they quickly turned their attention back at the screen and the teacher. Even in the midst of consistent flashes of banter and joking, the animation on screen and Ms. Luna successfully drew the students' attention back in, as she played the video, paused it, and continued to answer and ask further questions. Judging by the smiling faces, laughter, and constant movement of the students, in conjunction with the active participation and engagement with the video, I could tell the students were having great time talking to one another and playfully engaging with Ms. Luna.

The animation video that was playing was showing the process of ionic bonding. The classic example that was demonstrated was sodium chloride; one atom of sodium (the cation) gives one electron to the chlorine atom (the anion), which causes the atoms to stick together to form a molecule called sodium chloride. The electrons were represented by one set of circles in one color for the sodium atom, and another set of circles of another color for the chlorine atom. One of the questions that stood out from Ms. Luna was about the stability of each atom on their own before the outermost (valence) electron

of the sodium atom is transferred to the chloride atom producing an ionic bond. The students did not seem to understand her question, so Ms. Luna asked the students to count the number of electrons for each atom. Darlene, a mothering student who is also in Ms. Santos' class, darted up to screen to count the circles (electrons). After she counted the circles Darlene pointed out that one of the molecules (sodium) only had one "bolita" (circle, literal translation: little ball) on its outermost shell, whereas the other atom has many more and only needed one more to be full.

Unfortunately, even this observation was not enough to help students arrive at a consensus of whether the two atoms were stable on their own. In the midst of further laughter, and ongoing flashes of disengagement, several students asked Ms. Luna to play the video again. However, Ms. Luna refused the students' pleas, and instead began to tell a story about an accident she experienced in Chemistry lab when she was a college student. She accidentally mixed sodium with another chemical and it exploded. The students laughed as the teacher asked: "so is sodium stable?" This time most of the students agreed that it is not. Then she asked the students whether chlorine is toxic? She immediately pointed out that chlorine is bleach and many of them may have bleach in their house for cleaning. Most students agreed that chlorine is toxic and not a stable chemical. After constantly redirecting students to "pay attention" as they talked over one another and joked during her ongoing questioning, she then asked the students whether sodium chloride is toxic. Many students almost immediately blurted out "Yes!" Ms. Luna responded, "No, it's not!" Darlene exclaimed, "I don't get it!" The rest of the students also expressed confusion. Ms. Luna replied, "That's why you should pay attention!"

When she said this, I looked up from my screen as I viciously typed and I thought to myself, “They are paying attention; they’ve been responding to her questions. The students just reasoned that if sodium and chlorine are both unstable and toxic by themselves, then Sodium chloride must also be unstable and toxic.” In my experience as teacher facilitator and trainer, it has not been uncommon for teachers to misinterpret student activity and giddiness for inattention.

To help them out, Ms. Luna pointed out that the sodium chloride is salt, so they eat it all the time. When sodium and chlorine are put together then it becomes a stable molecule since one electron is transferred from one atom to another and as result they bond or stick together. An outpour of “Oh!” and “Ah-ha!” comments flooded the room. Darlene’s voice, however, overpowered the rest as she said, “Thank you, thank you!” After Darlene thanked the teacher for clarifying the confusion, Ms. Luna began playing the animation video again, and the students quickly began to listen as valence electrons were further explained. Once the video was done playing, some of the students sarcastically exclaimed, “Yay! It’s over!” Ms. Luna returned the sarcasm, “Yay! You have a quiz!” Dora playfully asked, “Why are you so mean Ms.!” Another student beamed, “Are we gonna watch another video tomorrow!?” Ms. Luna began passing out pens to the students so they could mark their answers on a sheet of paper. The quiz was taken collectively, since the quiz was included in the video after the animation. It was essentially a review of what they had just learned in the video. After each question was read out loud by the voice in the video, Darlene had something to say. Either she claimed she did not get the question, or it was too easy. I noticed that Darlene’s intent behind

many of her comments and questions was to obtain Ms. Luna's attention. She even stood up at times to verify whether she had the correct answer for some of the quiz questions. Based on Ms. Luna's nods, it seemed that Darlene was less worried about whether she had the correct answer; she simply relished her interactions with Ms. Luna.

A Closer Analysis of Ms. Luna's Classroom Interactions

The above portrait of my first visit to Ms. Luna's 8th grade science class describes the dynamic and overwhelming set of interactions that commonly take place there. Although the class is small, usually 6-10 students, the students cohesively produced a loud array of sounds that filled up the space. Throughout most of the class time, Ms. Luna stood close to the screen next to a desk with a computer mouse that she used to play, pause, and rewind the video as she explained ionic bonding and valence electrons to the students. Although the students were loud and often disruptive with side comments and jokes, they were nonetheless highly engaged and participated extensively as they squirmed in their seats. They looked like they were having a great time, interacting with the teacher and also with one another as the students opened up plenty of opportunities to joke and play with one another. Ms. Luna did not necessarily play along with the students, however, she practiced much patience with the students and consistently redirected students through short statements like "pay attention." Her short statements were usually enough to get the students attention and students would turn around and smile at the teacher and look back at the screen. Their smiles seemed to signify a certain kind of satisfaction, as if part of their intent was not only to joke with peers, but also to get the teacher's attention. It looked like the students were competing with one another to

steal a glance or statement from the teacher. Part of their competition was to ask questions out loud; these questions included 1) on-topic questions about the lesson, 2) off-topic questions about science in general, 3) silly questions for joking purposes (i.e. "Ms.! Knock, knock!"), and 4) questions about the teachers' personal life (i.e. "Ms.! What kind of car do you drive?" or "Do you speak Spanish?"). Ms. Luna usually did not answer questions that were completely off-topic, especially personal questions, which didn't help quench their thirst to know more about her personal life.

As students squirmed in their seats and competed for the most presence in the room, Ms. Luna calmly stood in place with little movement, yet her steady stream of short commands, "turn around" and "look up at the screen," kept reeling the students' attention back in as she worked towards accomplishing her goal of teaching the students the basics of ionic bonding. Ms. Luna acted more like an anchor for the students as she redirected them and grounded them through the use of an animation video that they were encouraged to walk up to and point out the electrons, or "bolitas" as Darlene, one of the teen mothers, called them. In contrast to Mrs. Santos' conductor teaching style that orchestrates the movements, comments, and interactions of the students, Ms. Luna's anchor style of teaching (with limited movements and punctuated short statements) enabled the students to direct the rhythm of the classroom without steering too far off topic. They had the space to stretch out the possibilities and magnitude of their interactions with one another and the teacher, resulting in an interesting, collective style of learning.

What also struck me is that much of the students' joking revolved around the teacher's heavy northern Mexican accent, her mispronunciation of words, and her faulty sentence syntax. For instance, when the teacher asked the class what kind of bond was being shown in the video, she mispronounced the word bond and instead said bun. The students laughed and as they repeated "buns" several times. During Ms. Luna's story about her Chemistry lab accident, she explained that the fumes produced by the chemical reaction nearly choked her, however, she pronounced choked as "shoked." The students again laughed as they repeated the teacher's "shoked" to one another. However, I noticed that the students were mostly amused by the teacher's accent, which prompted several of the students to ask Ms. Luna whether she spoke Spanish. However, the teacher refused to engage with the students' questions about her Spanish speaking background, and instead she chose to charge forward with the lesson. After all, it seemed clear that she is a native Spanish speaker like many other students in the classroom who often spoke in Spanish in addition to English. Even though Ms. Luna did not speak to the students in Spanish, her accent and trouble pronouncing certain words in English forged a connection with the students as the they collectively took up several opportunities to be outspoken and take chances in answering her questions.

As the students' anchor, Ms. Luna was very selective about which student questions she would take seriously and incorporate into the lesson. When the class expressed confusion about what Ms. Luna meant by stability, several of the students asked and even demanded the teacher to rewind the animation so that they could listen to the explanation again. Instead, the teacher refused their demands, and she decided to try

another route to help students understand the purpose behind her question. She told a story about her Chemistry lab accident and she linked chlorine to bleach, a household cleaner. From where I sat, I saw that the students followed along with her story and understood that sodium and chlorine are unstable and toxic, so when the teacher asked them about sodium chloride, they logically deduced that it is unstable too, but the teacher seemed a little frustrated by this point and reprimanded the students that they were not listening. When she reminded students that sodium chloride is salt, they collectively understood that salt is not toxic because it is a stable molecule. One of the students even pointed out, that chlorine has eight electrons when it is bonded with sodium—they made the connection between electrons and stability. Darlene even celebrated the breakthrough by saying, "Thank you! Thank you!" Contrary to Ms. Luna's impression, the students followed her stories and real-life examples even in the midst of what seemed like chaos. In the midst of a swirling storm of comments, jokes, banter, questions, squirming, and high energy from the students, Ms. Luna anchored the students in place to ensure they understood the content of the lesson. The students appreciated this role from the teacher, and Darlene, the individual with the most powerful presence in the room, expressed this appreciation directly to the teacher as she thanked her for clearing up a storm of confusion among the students.

After the video, the students took a quiz that was included after the animation. Each quiz question was read out loud by a female voice in the video, and the students marked their answers on a sheet of paper after the multiple choice answers were read out loud. During this time, students called out answers jokingly, asked the teacher to clarify

certain aspects of the questions, or they would playfully report that the questions were easy. Darlene, in particular, stood up several times to ask the teacher whether her answers were correct. Throughout the entire quiz, Ms. Luna stood in place and reprimanded students as she moved them along at a quick pace, even as one of the students yelled out, "Wait Miss!" But Ms. Luna kept on going so that the students were compelled to keep up and cut their own banter short. Before the class ended, one of the students enthusiastically asked whether they were going to watch another animation video. Based on the student's question, it seemed that the students may not get whole group instruction every day, so when it comes time to watch an animation video, they savor the open field of possibilities for interaction. Indeed, the more I observed the class, the more I noticed that whole group instruction did not happen everyday. Students often had class projects or individual class assignments to do, so whenever they had whole group instruction it was their chance to directly engage with Ms. Luna and their peers collectively with a guaranteed audience. They exchanged the roles of audience member and performer as they shared the stage with Ms. Luna.

Although Ms. Luna's anchor-like style opened up opportunities for the students to share the stage with her, the teacher nonetheless instilled classroom structure through routines and protocols like the "bell ringer" activity. In the next portrait, I will discuss the underlying purpose of this particular routine and what is says about Ms. Luna's expression of care for her students.

BELL RINGER ACTIVITIES WHEN THERE ARE NO TARDY BELLS?: MS. LUNA'S EXPRESSION OF CARE

I found it interesting that during the passing period, and right at the beginning of class, the students would take a laptop from the side of the room, where they were stacked on top of each other like old textbooks, and they immediately worked on some sort of "brain game" or puzzle on a website called Lumosity. It stood out to me because none of the other classes I observed used that same routine, so I understood that it must be a "Ms. Luna thing." When the students would finish the activity, an email of completion would be sent to Ms. Luna, thereby rewarding them with a daily work credit. During an informal conversation, I asked Ms. Luna to explain the activity that students worked on at the beginning of every class with their laptops. With a focused gaze onto a nearby laptop, she shared that it helped her students "warm-up" their minds for class, and it also demarcated a clear transition from one class to the next and prepped them to work in her class. She further pointed out that there are no tardy bells during passing periods, so this was her way to add structure to her class and help the students switch gears and begin a new set of activities. Although there are no tardy bells, she nonetheless dubbed the daily Lumosity ritual as the "bell ringer."

One day, during her 4th period Biology class, I overheard one of the male students, Robert, ask out loud why they have to do bell ringers, and Ms. Luna simply responded, "It's an easy 100!" Robert fired another question, "what if I don't want a 100?" Ms. Luna shot back with a familiar statement, "It's your choice." Although, Ms. Luna explained the purpose and goal for using Lumosity as a "bell ringer" with me, she did not go through the same lengthy explanation for Robert who raised the same inquiry.

Instead she focused on the fact that it was an easy grade for the student. Her usual discourse with students largely rested on their grades and credits, so her major area of concern for them was that they had access to catch up on their credits to graduate high school. During my interview with Ms. Luna, she also explained in a serious tone, "I concern for my kids [sic], I care for them." When I asked her how she expresses care for her students, she responded, "I try to give them plenty of opportunities." She elaborated her statement by explaining that she gave them opportunities to bring up their grades and receive credit for the course because she knew that many of her students were going through extenuating circumstances at home. This made it hard for them to attend school consistently and keep up with assignments and projects. Thus, she tailored classroom activities in a way that guaranteed they would receive as much credit as possible each day they made it to class. This especially applied to mothering students who would often miss school before and after they gave birth.

So when Robert asked why it's important to work on bell ringers everyday, for Ms. Luna, it was enough to respond to Roberts' inquiry with a short statement about it being an easy 100. Her primary concern for students was for them to receive credit for her course, and this concern trumped the student's request for a deeper explanation. This was achieved through the familiar words teachers often give students in U.S. schooling, "It's your choice."

A Closer Look at Ms. Luna's Purpose and Pedagogical Mode of Care

One way of interpreting this interaction in the above portrait can be drawn from what Valenzuela (1999) states about traditional U.S. schooling, where teachers often

show aesthetic caring through enacting an individual choice paradigm. In this paradigm, teachers take for granted a particular middle-class and historically white understanding of success as linked to good grades needed to go to college, and students are assumed to understand the value of a pre-determined set of abstract ideas of success-oriented student behavior. Through a white, middle class schooling perspective that values the attainment of "good grades" to secure advancement into a college-bound trajectory, Robert was expected to simply accept that answer: easy 100.

However, coming from a place of curiosity and seeking further understanding of Ms. Luna's thinking, the "easy 100" explanation did not suffice for the student. Ms. Luna noticed that the student asked the question while he was still working on Lumosity when many others had already moved on to work on their class projects on biomes. He, along with one or two other students, were falling behind in class and Ms. Luna strategically cut the student short to ensure that no more class time would be used on Lumosity and he could join the rest of his peers to work on the class project. Hence, she resorted to the individual choice discourse to signify that he needed to finish Lumosity and move on with the class. In fact, after her exchange with this student, she picked up her head and asked whether everyone was done with Lumosity. She further announced that they should be working on their projects. From an aesthetic vs. authentic caring lens, it may seem that this exchange was an example of aesthetic caring. However, Ms. Luna's subsequent expression for concern and care about her students in the interview regarding attendance and their proneness to falling behind in school, invoked a more authentic mode of caring that *operates under the guise* of aesthetic caring. It is not necessarily a pre-determined set

of ideas that motivates her dialogue with students, but rather her highly cognizant motivation to ensure that students are given opportunities to receive credit for her class and graduate. She also pushed students to keep up with the rest of the class and work on their class assignments and projects as much as possible during the class period, because if they were absent the next day, then they would fall behind and consequently have a harder time to finish their work.

During a casual conversation, Ms. Luna explained to me that her Biology class in particular is an accelerated program in which she is supposed to teach a year's worth of Biology material in one semester. Because she has to work at a fast pace, she was even more cognizant that the students could fall further behind in class if they missed class compared to the average student in a traditional Biology classroom. Ms. Luna was working with a fast-paced curriculum with students who had enough trouble keeping up with a traditionally paced classroom as it is, so she looked for ways to structure her class (such as using bell ringers), while at the same time giving students credit for completing the bell ringers and boosting their grades. Her style was a delicate dance between providing the necessary structure students cannot provide themselves, and allowing the necessary flexibility students need to cope with their extenuating circumstances and not fall behind.

Although RGV School fosters a family-like atmosphere in which teachers can feel supported, Ms. Luna did not have access to time flexibility. This underlying pressure and urgency undergirded her pedagogical interactions in way that curtailed her motivation to provide deeper explanations for her students. Ms. Luna turned to traditional classroom

structures and discourses as a familiar and easily recognizable resource from which to build consistency, routine, and opportunities for her students to receive as much credit in a day as possible. Thus, she resorted to interacting with students in way that seemingly projected aesthetic caring (Valenzuela 1999), when she actually acted out of her concern to push her students to keep up and not fall behind in class by spending too much time on Lumosity and asking questions about why they have to do certain activities in the classroom. In her mind, what mattered was: (1) the lack of time to "indulge" in deeper conversation about assignments, and (2) the irregular attendance of students, so that if they didn't finish their work, they would dramatically fall behind, thereby jeopardizing their progress and chances for graduation. Her pedagogical motivation did not necessarily come from an urge for instilling impersonal goals for her students, but rather it came from a place of "concern" for her students as a collective group with particular personal needs that the school recognized as critical. She tailored her style according to the structural and curricular limitations she faced as an educator, and the difficult realities and complexities her students often dealt with outside of school (more on this in a later section).

Aesthetic caring acted as strategic boundary-making because of its impersonal nature, yet it is a recognizable boundary if the students have had experiences in traditional schooling. She succeeds in keeping them from venturing out too off topic when she cannot afford to indulge their questions. In other words, through careful observation over the course of the school year, I was able to understand that what motivated her to provide structure for her students was rooted in authentic care, while

aesthetic care was deployed strategically to delineate boundaries that kept students on track. Students recognized, through various experiences with Ms. Luna, that she genuinely cared for them, thus these instances of aesthetic care did not impede the students' engagement with the class (as will be seen in the student interviews later).

MS. LUNA'S PERSONAL MATTERS COMPLICATE THE STORY

Not only was Ms. Luna facing professional factors that made her feel pressure as an educator, she was also undergoing personal complications that were adding additional layers of stress to her everyday classroom experiences. During the first couple of weeks I began observations in her classroom, Ms. Luna was renewing her work visa in order to keep working as a teacher in the U.S., so she was taking multiple trips just across the border to her hometown Matamoros, Tamaulipas in order to complete the process. During this time, her pedagogical interactions with her students were muddled with this personal matter, yet students were able to connect with her in ways she did not realize. The first portrait begins with the context of her travels to and from Matamoros.

Ms. Luna's Multiple Trips to Matamoros

After I finished observing one of her 8th grade classes during 6th period, I had a brief conversation with Ms. Luna regarding what was in store for her classes the next day. After a deep sigh she explained that she decided to move the test for her 8th period class for the next day. As she looked away with a concentrated and worried look, she noted that her 8th grade science class was behind. Rather than giving them the exam, she was thinking about doing an animation activity with the students so that they could

review material to help better prepare them for the test. I noticed that Ms. Luna frequently adjusted her plans for her students, especially the 8th grade science class, because it was important to her that the students have enough time to finish their assignments and be prepared to pass exams for the class. In a formal interview with her, she explained that it is critical for her to accommodate her students by giving them extensions, readjusting the structure of her lessons, and creating review opportunities as a means to support students and show that she cared about their success in schools.

As I listened to Ms. Luna go through ideas to help the students review, I realized that her facial expressions usually conveyed a sense of worry or as she commonly said, "concern." However, on this day she seemed much more concerned than usual, and indeed, earlier during class, she seemed much less patient with her 8th grade students and irritable. She was also stuck to her desk much more and seemed distracted. This compelled many of the 8th graders, especially Darlene, to demand attention more than usual. Students flocked to her desk, or constantly called out "Miss!" to ask for help or simply get a reaction from their teacher. She simply seemed more tired and overwhelmed than usual, but I was not sure how to ask whether she felt okay. However, Ms. Luna changed the conversation, which saved me from having to figure out a way to ask her about her well being in way that didn't make it too obvious that she looked off that day:

> Ms. Luna: I'm sorry I didn't reply to your email. I was gone away from school because I've been working on my work visa in Matamoros these past couple of days!
>
> GR: Oh no! The bureaucracy!

Ms. Luna: Yes! (With a look of frustration)

I empathized with Ms. Luna as she explained the mess regarding paperwork, but it wasn't until later that it dawned on me that there had been multiple shootings in Matamoros between members of the same major drug cartels, between members of different cartels, and between the drug cartels and the Mexican Marines.[5] The local governance in Matamoros and in Mexico at large was intervening in drug cartel violence to stop the random shootings that often took place in random public places throughout Matamoros. However, such intervention often produced even further violence as more bullets often shot through the air from a greater number of trajectories. If citizens were caught in the wrong place and the wrong time, then casualties were inevitable and gunfire from either the drug cartels or the Mexican military could hit any citizen who could not take cover in time; anyone could become a casualty in the crossfire.[6] These shootings would occur for hours, so businesses and other public places, including government offices that handle paperwork pertinent to work visas, shut down so that people could take cover and keep away from the crossfire. Sometimes, either the military or drug cartels issued out warnings to the citizens in Matamoros if a shooting was planned or foreseen. For example, sometimes drug cartels would receive notice about the location of "traitors" from the same cartel or opposing members of other cartels that had been in

[5] During the time that Ms. Luna was traveling back and forth across the border to take care of her work visa paperwork multiple shootings occurred in Matamoros. They are discussed in the following news sources: "Thirteen Mexicans killed in gun battles in Matamoros" (2013), Wells (2013).

[6] The following articles show how citizens can become causalities in shoot outs that take place in the streets of Matamoros. One article, in particular discusses how bullets often travel across the border to hit buildings on the university campus in Brownsville because it is so close to the border: "Matamoros shootings leave dozens dead" (2010), Ortiz (2009).

hiding, so an execution may be planned to end the life of the "wanted" individual. These executions often became massive shootouts since the individuals in hiding may have their own backup team depending on how powerful the individual was in the wider Narcotraficante scene. Other times, it was the Mexican military that may receive notice of where notorious drug lords may be found in the city, so a massive shoot out would be organized to execute the drug lord and their followers.[7] There is an underground system in place to warn local people in the city, but this system is far from perfect, so unexpected shootings can happen at any time. In spite of this, folks in Matamoros have exhibited resounding resilience to keep going in their daily lives, however vigilant and cautious. They continued to work, attend school, and maintain connections with family on both sides of the border and in neighboring rural towns outside of Matamoros.[8]

This unpredictable violent context is what Ms. Luna had been dealing with in addition to the bureaucracy of obtaining a work visa in the midst of a highly xenophobic and suspicious political climate for Mexican citizens searching for or renewing their opportunities to work in the United States. In fact, for a couple of days before the day Ms.

---

[7] The following NPR news coverage gives a short comprehensive account of how Matamoros, Tamaulipas in Mexico has changed ever since the cartel violence erupted. Yet people continue to carry out their daily lives and find ways to have their family celebrations despite the violence. It also mentions that the cartel violence is often underreported, in local newspapers especially, because of threats and physical harm imposed on journalists and editors of newspapers for "saying too much": Burnett (2015).

[8] In a newspaper article by Nelsen (2015), the struggles and signs of the resilience of the people in Matamoros are discussed in connection to the dire troubles and violence that currently overshadows the town. The article also mentions how people rely on social media to receive notices and warnings about possible or current shootings. The government also issues out warnings to citizens, so that they know to stay away from public areas. Much of this knowledge is also under the radar because I have learned about this through my own experiences living along the border during the time of my study. Also, my immediate and extended family who live on both sides of the border frequently talk about the violence, in order to keep one another up to date and protect one another from becoming casualties. During the time of my study my parents, as well as my aunts and uncles, were frequently crossing the border into Matamoros and back, so I was hyper aware of times that were not safe to cross the border.

Luna told me about her work visa preoccupation, and while Ms. Luna was traveling back and forth across the border to renew her work visa, there had been a couple of shootings. This is the environment and set of obstacles that Ms. Luna was facing, so her irritability with students, her expressions of worry, and lack of patience made perfect sense to me. It was a difficult time for her to go through renewal of a work visa.

"Are you from over here or over there?": Students connect with Ms. Luna's Mexicaness

Ms. Luna's positionality as a young Mexican teacher with a work visa and a strong Northern Mexican accent is important to take into account in order to make sense of her pedagogical orientation. Through her anchor style of teaching, she made sure to keep students focused on topic during her classes, so she seldom responded to their curiosity about her personal life, especially when it came to her Mexicaness. For Ms. Luna, it was important that she maintained classroom structure to ensure that students kept up with their work in a timely manner. Because she had to cover a large amount of material for her class, she was hyper-aware of time frame limitations. She often avoided talking about her personal life because she didn't want students to "waste" time and fall behind in class. Ms. Luna seemed to perceive her reality as a Mexican teacher with a work visa, who sometimes struggled with speaking perfect English, as a distraction for her students, or even a weakness that deterred the maintenance of order. She also seemed uncomfortable with talking about her Mexicaness with students, particularly the 8th graders, because they often poked fun at her for her accent and mispronunciation of words in English. However, from where I sat when I observed her classes, it seemed like

her imperfections in speaking English, and the evidence that she was from Matamoros, was actually a point of connection for her students to identify with her and like her more for it. Despite trying to keep her personal life private, her accent and other struggles betrayed the boundaries she tried to maintain, but the result was not maliciousness from students but rather connection. Yet her preoccupation with time and keeping her students on track seemed to block her view of how students connected with her personal identity. The students joked and would often imitate her, but the speech they imitate is not far from how they speak themselves. They were attracted to her and openly joked to signal a sort of relief that their teacher is a lot like them, thereby forging a sense of belonging and community. Ms. Luna, however, seemed to miss this sense of community, even though it happened despite her unawareness.

Instead she seemed to perceive the students' behavior as immature and trying to "waste" class time when they actively searched for ways to learn more about her personal life. The students often asked whether she spoke Spanish, what kind of car she drove, what sort of music she listened too, and whether she liked to dance. They often attempted to chisel away at her tough surface to figure out just how "Mexican" she was, indeed, how much more she was like them. One day after I observed her 4th period Biology class, a female student from another class in a later period, dropped by her class to ask where Ms. Luna had been. Ms. Luna replied that she had been in Matamoros. The student's face lit up as she asked whether Ms. Luna was from "here" (meaning the U.S. side of the border) or "over there" (the Mexican side of the border). To the student's enjoyment, Ms. Luna responded that she was from Matamoros, so the student immediately asked if she

knew Spanish. Ms. Luna replied that she did speak Spanish. During this exchange, Ms. Luna hardly looked up from her desk as she rummaged through countless folders and documents. The student noticed that Ms. Luna looked incredibly busy and distracted, so she cheerily said bye to Ms. Luna. As the student left the room, there was a slight bounce to her step, and Ms. Luna said "bye" as the student skipped out the door.

What struck me about this exchange was that the student spoke in Spanish the entire time, whereas Ms. Luna consistently spoke in English. Ms. Luna also didn't stop what she was doing to give the student undivided attention to have a more engaged conversation on Ms. Luna's part. The teachers' attitude of taking care of business, and her preoccupation with personal stress about having to travel to Matamoros to renew her visa during a dangerous time, propelled her to miss out on how the student was actively connecting with her at that moment. The student was clearly excited and fascinated that Ms. Luna was from Matamoros and spoke Spanish like herself, however Ms. Luna did not reciprocate the excitement. Instead, Ms. Luna simply responded to the students' questions to keep the interaction short. Nevertheless, Ms. Luna's stale reaction did not lessen the student's positive and cheery attitude, because the student realized that the teacher was busy. She bid farewell and moved on with a look of satisfaction as if she left with an inside scoop of the teacher's personal life. This was enough to affirm her assumptions about Ms. Luna, based on her action and occasional evidence of her knowledge about Matamoros. The student forged a connection with her teacher even though Ms. Luna did not proactively begin the connection. The students' initiative and the teachers' confirmation of the students' assumption was enough to satisfy the student.

This exchange enabled me to understand how the students have come to like Ms. Luna and enjoy their time with her even though she was seemingly strict, limited in her movements, stuck to her desk, and generally on the quiet side. Within the context of an alternative school that is structured around the unique needs of students who require extra support to catch up with cr(Bondy, Ross, Hambacher, & Acosta, 2013)(Vasquez, 1988)edits and graduate, even teachers like Ms. Luna are read through a lens in which students assume that she cares for her students. Her flexibility with the way she sometimes betrayed her "structured" timelines and her imperfections that marked her Mexicaness were enough for students to connect with her and consequently seek her attention and approval.

Students were able to understand that Ms. Luna's serious attitude, and her "mean" or "strict" teacher persona was more of a style than an actual personality trait (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Bondy et al., 2013; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Kleinfeld, 1975; Vasquez, 1988; Ware, 2006). The students understood that Ms. Luna was "tough" on them because she cared, and the fact that she was in a school in which *all* teachers care about their students' well being reinforced this idea. This shows that the context of RGV school, a small and intimate school structured around the needs of students, can provide a space in which teachers can be read in humanizing ways by the students, even though the teachers may sometimes be stressed out and distant. Teachers in traditional schools, however, may not have this buffer. At an institutional level, students of color often feel that their school does not care about them, and this general view often compels students to interpret their teachers as literally "mean" or uncaring if they seem impersonal. Scholars (Fine et al.,

2000; Fine, & Zane, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999) have noted that youth of color, including Latino youth, have commonly felt like the school they attend is not caring or helpful. Consequently, their perception of their teachers is colored by the general conception of the school as a whole. This was evidenced by my conversations with the mothering students I interviewed, who made it clear that they felt their teachers didn't care about them in the traditional schools they attended prior to RGV School, but they thought all of their teachers cared at RGV.

In the next section, however, I will show what happens when Ms. Luna embraces her Mexicaness collectively with her students in her 4th period class. The following portrait shows how her Mexicaness drew the students closer to her because she invoked a sense of familiarity for the students. She reminded them of home, their families, and their surrounding border community. She also embraced her Mexicaness by infusing it into her pedagogical interactions with the students.

"THIS WAS A QUIET AND SMOOTH DAY!": MS. LUNA OPENS UP TO HER STUDENTS

It was around eleven in the morning when I walked into Ms. Luna's 4th period Biology class. I had already observed her 4th period class several times before, so by this point I was familiar with the individual names of students who regularly show up to class, including Esperanza and Susana who were the only two students in the classroom that were mothering students. As I greeted Ms. Luna, one of the male students, Fernando, immediately interjected:

Fernando: How are you doing today mam?

GR: (Turning to Fernando) I'm doing well, what about you?

Fernando: Fantastic! (He turned to the rest of the class) Are we all doing fantastic?

Ms. Luna: You should be a motivational speaker! (Speaking to Fernando)

Fernando: Yeah, I should! (He gives the teacher two thumbs up)

At first I was thrown off by Fernando's poignant greeting and I wondered what sort of classroom vibe was in motion for the day, but I eventually realized that Fernando was making it clear that I should greet the entire classroom when I come to observe them. Fernando made a great point, one that I should have been cognizant about in regards to showing respect to all the students. I had talked to the mothering students several times since I had interviewed them and informally conversed in other spaces, but the rest of the students were not as familiar with me, so Fernando's interjection of making him and the rest of the classroom visible to an ongoing visitor like me was a clever and important move on his part. It reminded me of the importance students placed on establishing mutual caring relationships among students and educators in the school. Several of the students, especially the mothering students (as they pointed out in the interviews) clearly understood the school is premised on the notion of teachers fostering personal and supportive relationship with the students, so there were certain expectations that students at RGV school had for the adults. For Fernando, that expectation did not exclude me. From another viewpoint, Fernando may have also been making a conscious effort to include me into the class that I had become a part of through my visits. Ms. Luna, in turn, validated Fernando's greeting by telling him that he should become a motivational speaker, so his leadership skill was recognized and further encouraged. The notions of

collectivity, belonging, and validation were further demonstrated that day in the classroom through the sharing of stories, experiences, and moments of pleasure and laughter—and the catalyst for these interactions was actually music.

As I settled into my usual place in the back of the room, I noticed that several students were absent that day, and only four students were present. One of the absent students was Susana because she had given birth to her baby and was being homeschooled for a couple of weeks while she recovered from the delivery. The only mothering student that was present was Esperanza, and as usual Esperanza was focused on her work that was laid out in front of her as she sat in a desk that was most closely located to Ms. Luna's desk. She did not have a laptop in front of her like two of the other students did, so I assumed that she was done with the bell ringer and was working on her main assignment for the day. Fernando and one of the female students, Teresa, had their laptops so it seemed that they were still working on their bell ringers. My assumption was proven correct when Ms. Luna asked both Fernando and Teresa whether they were done with their bell ringer.

As usual, Ms. Luna was sitting at her desk clicking away and sorting through papers and folders as she called out student names to update them on what assignments they were missing. Josh, another male student, out of nowhere, exhibited frustration when he complained that people kept texting him, so Ms. Luna responded to his frustration by telling him to stop texting. Ms. Luna noticed that Josh had the same phone as her, so she let him know this while his eyes remain fixed onto his phone with his thumbs bouncing off and on the screen responding to the texts. Ms. Luna then lifted her head as she

announced to the class that the following day they would have a quiz about biomes based on the notes they were currently working on for that class day. A high-pitched ringing sound came out of Josh's phone after Ms. Luna finished her announcement, and Fernando turned to tell Josh that he should look up "the dog whistle." Ms. Luna asked Fernando, not to give Josh any ideas. I was expecting more whistling sounds to come from Josh's phone since he had successfully attracted his male peer's attention, but instead music with lyrics in Spanish began to flow out of Ms. Luna's computer. The music sounded familiar and reminded me of the kind of music my mom enjoyed, which she called música romántica (romantic music) or música internacional (international music). Many of the artists for this genre of music are from various Latin American countries and even European countries like Spain and Italy (many Italian artists also sing their songs in Spanish to find success among Spanish speaking audiences). Although young people may not often listen to música romántica, the sound of music flowing from Ms. Luna's desktop was enough to spark Josh's curiosity and trigger the following dialogue:

Josh: Miss, are you into Gilberto Quintanilla?

Ms. Luna: This is a romantic track.

Josh: But you don't like him?

Ms. Luna: I do, but I don't want to hear him right now, only when I'm dancing.

Josh began playing one of Quintanilla's songs anyway, while Ms. Luna assisted Fernando with one of the questions on his assignment, followed by Esperanza. By this point, Ms. Luna was on her feet as she helped students out with their assignments. She

walked from one desk to the next, as the sound of música romántica flowed out of Ms. Luna's desktop and Quintanilla's electrifying music blasted out of Josh's phone. These contrasting sounds clashed and created disjointed rhythms with odd-fitting melodies. After helping a student, Ms. Luna turned to Josh to tell him that she doesn't mind that he is playing his own music as long as he finishes his assignment for the day. She then proceeded to walk to Josh's desk to give him further instruction on how to complete the assignment.

Gilberto or Beto Quintanilla is a famous local artist that is highly respected and admired by people of all ages who live along the U.S./Mexico border in south Texas. He is notorious for making corridos about Mexican drug cartels, but he also composes corridos about the common experiences of people (especially men) who live in south Texas or northern Mexico. Corridos are a type of Mexican music that is characteristic of the southwest in the U.S. and northern Mexico. The accordion is the defining instrument and sound of corrido music. In fact, polka music greatly influenced the cultural production of corridos among Mexicans along the U.S./Mexico border. German settlements and the introduction of the accordion gave rise to different kinds of regional music that dominate the southwestern region of the U.S. and northern Mexico today.

After Ms. Luna finished orienting Josh on his assignment, she walked up to Marianna, a very reclusive and quiet student who usually sits away from the rest of the students, to ask her if she needed any help. Mariana shook her head, but Ms. Luna proceeded to help her out anyway as she pointed out parts of the worksheet where it seemed Mariana could actually benefit from extra assistance. Right after assisting

Mariana, she walked up to Fernando to check on his progress with his assignment. Teresa's voice then redirected Ms. Luna's attention, "Mam, I don't get it." The teacher walked over to Teresa's desk, then began a line of questioning through which the student's prior knowledge was accessed little by little, eventually leading Teresa to the correct answer to the question. Ms. Luna traveled from one desk to another and weaved her way around the room to check in on students and answer their questions; I took note that this was the most movement I had seen from her ever since I began the classroom observations. That day she was not tied to her desk, and she initiated many of the interactions with her students. Rather than students walking up to her desk, this time Ms. Luna took much more control in proactively providing assistance and aid for the students as they worked on their assignments. I also noticed that Ms. Luna's response to the students' questions involved a greater use of scaffolding techniques than I had previously witnessed. Instead of hearing a conglomerate of student voices asking Ms. Luna questions about their work, Ms. Luna's voice could be heard much more than usual as she asked students one question after the next to help them make connections and arrive at the right answer.

In the midst of feverishly typing my observations of her high energy, constant movement, and long line of questioning, I soon forgot that there were two different kinds of music playing at the same time. Eventually, however, Ms. Luna stopped the music at her desktop, thereby formally dubbing the corrido music, coming from Josh's phone, as the official backdrop music for the class. As a new song from Beto Quintanilla began to play, Josh momentarily stopped working to share out loud that he played the same song

for his Dad during his birthday party. Josh explained that his father cried because the lyrics were about growing older and times changing. Esperanza then asked Ms. Luna a question, followed by Josh. After Ms. Luna finished helping Josh, he finished telling his story about his Dad's birthday party as Ms. Luna listened intently before she moved on to help Teresa again. Suddenly the music changed to another genre; Josh began playing Banda music. Banda music in Mexico is characterized by brass instruments and the tuba is the main instrument that maintains the beat and base of the music. This style of music originated in the state of Sinaloa in Mexico.

While the steady tuba sound flowed out of Josh's phone and punctuated the space, Esperanza opened up a bag of Hot Funyuns and began to draw them out of the bag one by one with one hand, while the other hand flipped the paper back and forth, then picking up her pen to write down responses to the questions. Ms. Luna traveled back to her desk, then to the lab room behind her desk, and then to the back of the room to check the cabinets under the fume hood. She seemed to be looking for something, but eventually she redirected her attention back to the students as Josh began playing another set of songs of another music genre. This time música Norteña began to fill the air as melodies from the accordion re-entered the scene. Música Norteña is a more general style of music that is from the northern region of Mexico, particularly in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, hence the name música Norteña, which literally means music from the northern region. And like corridos, música Norteña is also characterized by the accordion, but the lyrics is more thematic instead of the narrative style that is typical of corridos. Ramón Ayala is a prime example of a Norteño artist. In fact, the first song that

Josh began playing was from Ramón Ayala called *Un Puño de Tierra*. As the song played, Teresa turned around in her seat to tell Josh, in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear, that the song was played during her Father's funeral. She turned back around to keep working as she sang along with the main chorus of the song:

El día que yo me muera,

No voy a llevarme nada,

Hay que darle gusto al gusto,

La vida pronto se acaba,

Lo que pasó en este mundo,

Nomás el recuerdo queda,

Ya muerto voy a llevarme…nomás un puño de tierra…

(The day that I die, I'm not going to take anything with me,

you must enjoy life while you can [not a direct translation],

life will be over soon, what happened in this world,

only memories will remain, when I die I will only take,

only a handful of soil)

Teresa continued to talk about her Father, her brothers, and even the rest of her family as the song played, but even in the midst of sharing her stories, she kept working, and Ms. Luna periodically looked her way while she continued to move about the room assisting students. More Norteño songs flowed out of Josh's phone. Esperanza asked Ms. Luna for some white out, and as Ms. Luna pulled out a small bottle of white out from her desk and passed it to Esperanza, she let out a small grito when a song she really liked

began to play. Esperanza and Teresa giggled with amusement when Ms. Luna unexpectedly let out a grito. However, Josh changed the song, and Ms. Luna exclaimed, "Why you change it [sic], I really like that song." Esperanza then shared, "My Dad would play these songs in barbeques to get drunk." Teresa agreed with Esperanza and shared that her family did the same in parties too. Esperanza then asked Ms. Luna, "Miss, how do you know these songs?" Ms. Luna explained that she knew the music because of bailes (dancing parties). The young women seemed surprised again and they giggled once again out of amusement.

Ms. Luna began singing along with the lyrics of another song that Josh began to play, her eyes lit up and exclaimed, "Oh! I like that song!" Ms. Luna began to sing along, but then paused and said, "That's true! Don't look for someone that's just pretty, because after the years pass by the pretty goes away!" Ms. Luna was referring to the lyrics of the song. Esperanza took another bite out of a Funyun as she looked at Ms. Luna and listened to her advice incited by the lyrics of a regional Mexican song. More songs steadily flowed out Josh's phone as he picked out songs that so far had struck up stories, memories, and even advice among the students *and* from Ms. Luna. The students continued to work diligently, including Josh who would intermittently pick up his phone to change songs or type of music. There were momentary gaps between songs as Josh would be a little late in picking up his phone to play the next song. In fact, Ms. Luna jokingly remarked, "Where's the DJ? There should be no silent space between songs!" Josh then asked Ms. Luna, "Mam, do you know this song Miss!" Another Norteño song began playing, and the teacher exclaimed "yes!" with a huge smile and she began

dancing in her seat. Teresa began laughing as Esperanza asked another question about the assignment. More questions emerged out of the students as they scrambled to finish as many of the questions as they could. When the class began to wrap up, Ms. Luna asked the students to finish at home and study for the quiz. Josh stood up and talked to Ms. Luna about the kind of music his mom likes, and Fernando shared his success stories with promoting events on social media like Facebook. In the midst of Fernando sharing his future plans to become a successful events promoter, the students packed up their belongings and made their way out of the classroom when the bell rang. After all the students left, Ms. Luna looked at me and said:

Ms. Luna: This was a quiet and smooth day!

GR: Why do you think that is?

Ms. Luna: (chuckles) I don't know, I think it can be many things. The weather, even what they ate.

GR: I guess there are many variables!

I found it interesting that Ms. Luna named variables that are out of her control to help explain what seemed like a quiet and smooth class time with her Biology students. However, there was so much that she did differently this time that actually yielded a different set of results in which she had more control of the flow of the classroom, even tough she allowed Josh to play music from his phone out loud for the class. She had a much stronger presence in the room this time as she moved from student to student to help them on their assignment. In fact she was proactive in providing assistance to the students, instead of the students overcrowding at her desk or calling her over so that she

can help. Ms. Luna's voice also filled up the room much more than usual as she used scaffolding strategies to enable students to arrive at the answers, instead of giving them the answers. Her mood was also much more cheerful as she smiled, laughed, and even joked with the students. When she started playing music on her desktop, it clearly sent a message to the students that she was in a different kind of mood, and it prompted Josh to begin playing music instead of irritating sounds that only served to distract students. Ms. Luna eventually let Josh become the official "DJ" of the class as he played music that the students were very familiar with because it reminded them of their families, especially their father, given the patriarchal nature of the music (popular regional Mexican music is usually about the experiences of men). Although, Ms. Luna surrendered her música romántica to the regional and even local music (Beto Quintanilla), it actually opened up opportunities for her to expose herself more fully to her students by expressing her joy through singing and even dancing. The students were greatly amused with getting to know Ms. Luna at a more personal level, and in turn, the students also exposed their personal lives to one another and the teacher through the music that invoked a collective Mexicaness that is specific to the region (south Texas in the U.S. and northern Tamaulipas in Mexico). Ms. Luna had much more control of the flow of interactions in her class than she thought. When she opened up and embraced her cultural roots along with a proactive demeanor in helping students, the student-led dynamic that often overpowered Ms. Luna's classes became a more mutually-orchestrated set of interactions between the teacher and students that fostered deeper connections and relationships.

A CLOSE-UP ON LUNA'S PEDAGOGICAL INTERACTIONS WITH TEEN MOTHERS

So far I have presented portraits of the general classroom dynamics that unfolded in Ms. Luna's classes, as well as how she interacted with her students in light of the contextual limitations of her teaching practices. I also discussed how she expressed care to her students, and while these expressions may seem aesthetic or impersonal, the students nonetheless connected with her Mexicaness in the midst of a school structure that projects care at an institutional level. They also understood her "strict" style as her caring about their well being in school. Finally, the last portrait showed that when Ms. Luna went against her script of "mean" teacher and opened up to her students, she enjoyed her time with students in a way that incited deeper pedagogical interactions that enabled the students to remain engaged with their assignment, while at the same time building a stronger sense of community in the classroom.

At this point in the chapter I will now zoom in on Ms. Luna's interactions with the mothering students in the two classes I observed. The portraits in the previous sections included the strong presence of mothering students, however, in the next couple of sections I will unpack how Ms. Luna's understanding of her mothering students infused into her teaching strategies and pedagogy in particular ways.

"I just try to treat 'em in the same way": Ms. Luna's Mature vs. Immature Labeling

Ever since my first observation of Ms. Luna's 8th grade science class, the student who stood out the most among the plethora of overlapping student voices was Darlene. During my fieldwork, Darlene was not only in Ms. Luna's 8th grade science class, but she was also in Mrs. Santos' Teen Parenting class. In Ms. Luna's class, Darlene's heavy

toned voice and enthusiasm especially stood out from the cluster of students in the science classroom during most of my observations of 6th period. She actively responded to most of the teacher's questions correctly, while she successfully managed side conversation with her peers. She also asked the teacher several questions about the lessons, and she would also make several connections between current lessons and prior lessons from the class. Among her relevant questions and comments, however, there were several times that Darlene would go off-topic and ask the teacher personal questions, or she would ask redundant questions with obvious answers in order to get the teacher's attention as well as the attention of her peers. For Darlene, it was important to be heard and actively participate in class. Although Darlene demonstrated a habit for interrupting the teacher during whole group instruction or asking silly questions, she was nonetheless consistently engaged in class and showed considerable concern in completing her assignments on time and doing well on her tests. Because of Darlene's preoccupation with completing her work on time, as well as her urgency to fully understand new information taught in class, she would often test the limits of Ms. Luna's patience and willingness to provide ongoing assistance to students.

For instance, during one of my classroom observations, Darlene's voice was especially prominent; in fact her words dominated the pages of the notes I took that day. At the beginning of class, the students and I noticed that Ms. Luna seemed a little under the weather. Her face seemed a little paler than usual and a nagging cough seemed to possess her at times. Yet, her familiar concern with sorting through papers and clicking her mouse as she scavenged the screen on her desktop did not waver as she called on

student names to update them on their progress with grades, tests, and missing assignments in class. While Ms. Luna was hard at work at her desk and updating students, Darlene was increasingly becoming frustrated with her laptop as she yelled out that she could not find the Word program. She quickly grabbed another laptop and waited for it to boot up while she joked and chatted with students around her. While she continued to wait for the computer to start, she read the assignment that was written on the board out loud. After Darlene read the assignment, Ms. Luna sat up straight and raised her voice to reiterate what Darlene had read from the board, "You must complete your summary and reflection of the movie we watched yesterday by the end of today, because tomorrow you have a test!" Once Darlene's computer was finished starting up, she attempted to open Word but failed, so she yelled again in frustration, "Miss! Word won't open! What's wrong with these computers!" This time, Ms. Luna stood up from her desk and walked over to Darlene and took the laptop from the desk to walk it over to the computer teacher next door. During this whole interaction, some students were also testing out their computers to find one that worked, others were at the white board writing their names or other phrases for fun. Some students were off-task as they waited for the laptops to start up and others simply had not started working yet. Out of all the students, Darlene was the most preoccupied with getting started, even though she frequently joined her peers' frenzy as they laughed and joked.

Within a few minutes, Ms. Luna came back with Darlene's laptop, however it didn't go straight to Darlene, instead Ms. Luna kept working on it at her desk. Darlene jokingly blurted out, "Look Miss! My invisible computer!" Suddenly, out of nowhere,

another male student randomly asked Ms. Luna what kind of car she drove. Darlene took the opportunity to joke some more, “She drives a bike!” Most of the students heard the joke and laughed at the teacher’s expense while she attempted to focus on the issue with the laptop. Eventually, Darlene got her computer back and the Word program was working. I noticed, however, that Ms. Luna was not verbally replying much to Darlene’s comments, jokes, and questions. Instead, she pointed out Darlene’s low-cut top to inform her that it was highly inappropriate. Yet, I noticed that Carmela, another female student, also had a low-cut top, but Ms. Luna did not seem to notice or at least chose not to mention it out loud.

As the class went on, and students worked on their summaries and reflections, countless questions came up from the students about how to do the assignment. I lost track over how many times students, male students in particular, went up to Ms. Luna’s desk to ask her whether they were doing their work correctly. Darlene, on the other hand, hardly stood up to walk over to the teacher’s desk. Instead, she would yell at the teacher multiple times to ask her questions about the movie, like the names of characters, or the details of specific events in the film that Darlene had trouble remembering. Other students would answer many of Darlene’s questions, especially questions that had to do with spelling. Yet, it seemed that questions coming from male students were answered a greater number of times by Ms. Luna, especially for those who walked up to her desk. At one point, Darlene asked if she could read her summary to Ms. Luna. However, she refused to listen and instead asked, “Why, because it’s bad?” I’m not sure if Ms. Luna’s question was meant as a joke or if she spoke from frustration, but I could tell Darlene was

thinking of another way to get the teacher to read her work. One of the male students, on the other hand, began reading his summary out loud without permission, and Ms. Luna patiently listened to his summary and she offered some brief feedback. As a result, Darlene decided to walk up to Ms. Luna's desk and show her what she had written. Ms. Luna skimmed Darlene's work and then told her that she had written a reflection, not a summary. Darlene explained that it is both; she decided to do both of them together. However, Ms. Luna responded by explaining that the summary and reflection should be separate.

After class I approached Ms. Luna to ask whether Darlene had ever been identified as having ADHD/ADD. I asked the question because Darlene exhibited symptoms that are commonly associated with the condition. Ms. Luna's frustrations with the student prompted me to ask her if she had ever thought about providing accommodations for her student. However, after I posed the question to Ms. Luna, she brashly responded that she didn't know, "I don't like to look at labels because I don't like to judge students." I was thrown off by Ms. Luna's comment, because it struck me as a surprise that she wasn't familiar with any accommodations the students may need. In my experience with training pre-service teachers and observing veteran teachers in traditional schooling, identifying the needs of students with special education or ESL labels is common practice of which teachers are highly cognizant. It is a common practice for teachers to point out any "special needs" or accommodations students may need when they describe the diverse make-up of their classes. However, I noticed that for Ms. Luna (including Mrs. Santos, in Chapter 4, and later Mrs. Richardson in Chapter 6), this

discourse or practice is not part of her repertoire. For her, it does not seem to be necessary within the context of an alternative school that is structured around the notion of creating a family-like atmosphere. Teachers are expected to work according to the individual needs of students, and for Ms. Luna, whether a student has a special needs label or not, they all need accommodations in regards to extending timelines, restructuring lessons to reteach students, etc. To further illustrate Ms. Luna's critique of institutionalized student labels, including the label of "teen parent," here is an excerpt from a formal interview:

But the reality, I try just to treat 'em in the same way, not because you're a mom or not I'm just gonna be more nicer to you. I try, you know, to be standard so they don't feel oh I'm being rejected, or I'm being more special, like I try to make all my students feel special. All of them like in the same way, in the same degree. Uh, I don't treat them differently because they're moms or they're not moms. Of course, when they come and talk to me, I'm more flexible again with timing, with extended time, uh, but it's important for people, to understand that they're still people. They're still students and you don't um, you shouldn't be made in a huge difference. Or discrimination, you know? (Ms. Luna)

For Ms. Luna it is imperative that all students are held to a standard, yet at same time provided accommodations that are relevant for diverse student needs, situations, or circumstances. Although Ms. Luna's self-professed style reflected the notion of sameness, treating all students the same and making them all feel special, her actual

practice showed that ultimately she does treat students differently according to another kind of labeling—mature vs. immature students.

The mature vs. immature labeling came up when I tried to explain what I had noticed about Darlene that led me to believe that she could have ADHD. As soon as I began to explain why I suspected that Darlene might have ADHD, Ms. Luna interrupted me and said, "I know, she's very hyper and immature." Ms. Luna continued explaining that Darlene was very immature, loud, and disruptive. In fact, she went on to say that most of the students in her 6th period are immature and hyper, unlike her 4th period Biology class in which students are older and much more mature. I then asked Ms. Luna about her teen parents; what did she think about them in regards to maturity levels? She immediately responded that the teen mothers seem to be the most mature, except for Darlene. She is a teen mother, but she "tends to be immature." The teacher trainer and evaluator in me then decided to offer Ms. Luna another viewpoint on Darlene, "Well, I noticed that Darlene needs multiple stimuli to keep up her engagement in class and concentrate on her work." I began to give her examples of people I know, or students I've had in the past who have ADHD, who are able to listen to lecture while at same time engage in another side activity to help them maintain engagement. I also let Ms. Luna know that Darlene had a high level of energy that often compelled her to become disruptive, however, she consistently participated in class and had a sense of urgency in completing her assignments. She also seemed to genuinely want to understand the information taught in class and seek ways to make connections. I even gave Ms. Luna an example by telling her about a time that Darlene made a connection during a movie the

students watched in class. Darlene pointed out a physical change and Ms. Luna acknowledged Darlene's comment. Consequently, other students began to make connections much like Darlene, which enabled the students to practice scientific observations while they watched a movie. Darlene also said several negative comments and poked fun at the male students during the movie, but Ms. Luna's validation of Darlene's scientific observation helped redirect the kinds of comments Darlene, and consequently other students, made after the productive comment. After I shared my thoughts, Ms. Luna agreed and began to think a little further about the viewpoint I offered. While this exchange can be interpreted as a researcher influencing her participants in ways that are more involved than usual in academia, it is also an example of a feminist research practice of reciprocal knowledge (Reinharz, 1992). Ms. Luna provided me with invaluable knowledge and access to her classroom, and it was only fitting that I provided her with my knowledge as a teacher trainer and facilitator.

Ms. Luna's Informal Labeling Serves as an Interpretive Lens for her Students

The portrait above revealed a research surprise: although Ms. Luna did not like the use of labels because she felt it singled out students in ways that may made them feel like outsiders, she nonetheless used her own set of labels to make sense of students' behavior. She labeled her 8th grade class and the students in it as "immature" and "hyper" because they were younger students that exhibit a higher level of energy and curiosity. The 8th graders often expressed curiosity through their questions regarding the topics covered in class, as well as Ms. Luna's personal life. However, Ms. Luna read this set of student practices through a commonsense lens that deemed such behavior as immature

and hyper, rather than as curiosity or energy that might be channeled in productive ways. I point out this informal labeling practice because it served as an *interpretive* lens that Ms. Luna used to make sense of her students' behavior and interactions with her. This interpretive lens influenced how she chose to respond to her students pedagogically in regards to how she provided assistance and guidance for them and validated or invalidated their ideas. For Darlene, and the 8th graders in general, the students were read as "immature" and "hyper" so she responded to them accordingly through impersonal, short, and direct commands and redirections in order to keep them focused. She did this out of what she thought was their "own benefit" given her interpretive lens of their behavior as "immature."

The 9th and 10th graders, on the other hand, were older and a little more interested in getting the grades they needed to pass and move on. However, there were plenty of times the Biology students also expressed interest in learning more about certain topics that sounded interesting, like hybrid animals. However, Ms. Luna did not usually foster such curiosity if it was not immediately applicable to them finishing their assignment as quick as possible so that they could get their high school credits. Since the Biology students less frequently expressed such curiosity (or if they did they were not as vocal or demanding about it as the 8th graders), Ms. Luna made sense of her Biology students as much more mature than her 8th graders. Essentially, for Ms. Luna, any set of student practices that were not immediately applicable to the goal of working efficiently and passing class, was understood as immature behavior. During my interview with Ms. Luna she explained:

> …usually the older ones tend to ask you more because they really want to finish, they want to graduate, they want to get their credits. Usually the eight graders, who aren't even in high school, they don't know about credits. They don't know that they have to pass their class in order to earn those credits and be able to graduate. So, sometimes the older, more mature ones are the ones that ask you more questions. The little ones will ask you more questions but sometimes off topic—most of the time off topic.

For Ms. Luna, valid questions were those that stuck to the structure or set of practices she felt was most useful in getting the students to graduate—that is efficiency, questions that pertain to how to complete assignments correctly, establish time frames, and constant updates on grades and status on assignments. Hence, maturity was linked to a work ethic of efficiency, obedience, and properly "taking care of business." Her interpretive lens for what makes a mature student closely matched what RGV school deemed as a "good" or "model" student (I will talk more about this in Chapter 6 with another mothering student Kira)—that is, students who are focused on obtaining their course credits and are on track with graduating. Through this interpretive lens, Ms. Luna's pedagogical interactions with older students and mothering students were much more involved as she worked hard to provide the necessary assistance and guidance the students needed in order to finish their work on time and move on to the next activity.

Ms. Luna's Interpretive Lens is also Gendered

According to Bourdieu's theories of habitus and social structures, people in positions of authority (and who represent an institution) evaluate individuals' expressions

and actions against an imagined norm that is sanctioned by: (a) normative and mainstream beliefs; and (b) the institutional rules and goals in which they work. In schools, teachers (the authority figure in a classroom) have come to recognize the "legitimate" and "appropriate" ways of thinking and behaving in the classroom, and evaluate and may even rank students according to their manners, communication style, physical presentation, and more. Beth Hatt (2012) has written that the way a student looks, speaks, and acts can influence how smart they look in the eyes of the teacher. However, she writes that the expectations of "appropriate" student behavior are not neutral, and have a history rooted in white, middle-class cultural norms and values that favor individuality, aggressiveness in boys, passiveness in girls, no sexual behavior, and more. Students born into a family of parents who went to college and work in professional careers have a better chance of teaching their children the dispositions that more closely match the accepted teacher expectations, setting them apart in school because they have a better chance of being recognized and evaluated positively by the teacher and the school's own rules and expectations. Students have an even greater advantage if they don't express cultural or ethnic difference vis-à-vis a white cultural norm.

However, social class and white cultural manners are not the only types of expression that affect the way students are evaluated by teachers. As introduced in my theoretical framework, gender is a social structure that organizes how people relate to each other by providing an evaluative lens through which gender performances, expressions, and identities will be interpreted as appropriate or inappropriate. There are

normative gender behaviors that are more widely recognized as "acceptable" or "appropriate" in U.S. culture, and these tend to operate along the axes of masculinity (where boys' more aggressive behavior is expected) and femininity (where girls are expected to be more docile and quiet). This is further complicated by race, social class, physical ability, sexuality, and other social identities, so that in the U.S. society there are acceptable ways for Latino teenage boys and girls to behave, which may differ from what is accepted or expected of white teenage boys and girls, black teenage boys and girls, working class teenage boys and girls of different ethnicities, and so on. Following this theory, then, access to better educational opportunities can be achieved in part when students' gendered dispositions match what teachers expect of them. Students are ranked according to how close they match teachers' expectations of how boys and girls of various ethniciites should behave (Hatt, 2012). These normative behaviors and values are learned and promoted in various ways, including the media and political discourses that label certain behaviors as negative (for example government welfare reform advocates label single mothers as "welfare queens" and promote negative sentiments towards them). In traditional schools, a teen mother has transgressed appropriate and expected feminine behavior, and for Mexican teenagers this is accentuated by mainstream racial fears of the hyperfertility of Mexican women. However, a school's administrators and teachers have the power to modify the expectations of students (at least within that institution) so that teen motherhood at RGV School is evaluated in a new and different way that can positively impact teen mothers' educational experience.

For example, Ms. Luna demonstrated that the way she evaluated teen mothers was influenced by the way in which the school promoted care and goodwill towards students who demonstrated that they wanted to earn their education, while simultaneously promoting the idea that teen motherhood was not the end of a student's education. The teen parenting program, the daycare, and teachers' flexibility with assignments (just to mention a few examples), created a school structure that validated the experiences of teen moms and prevented teachers and administrators from marginalizing them. This in turn influenced Ms. Luna's relationships with teen mothers, a group of students whom she was especially willing to apply her approved label of maturity. This is because she recognized that these girls, more than the other students, were focused on receiving their credits as soon as possible to graduate. For instance, when I asked Ms. Luna whether there was a difference between motivating teen parenting students versus non-teen parenting students, she responded:

> Yes! There's a huge difference, and sometimes I think it's easier to motivate teen parents because they get it in their heads that "ok, I need to do this not for myself. I can't be selfish anymore. I have to look out for my kid. I have to look out for my child… I have to finish school. I have to get my diploma," so I think that they have motivation.

Their practices and the way they expressed their motivation signaled a sense of individual responsibility that was most in tune with Ms. Luna's sense of urgency for all her students to finish high school, which also matched the school's goals of helping students finish their education. In other words, teen mothers' efficiency and highly

concentrated efforts best complimented both Ms. Luna's image of what a mature, responsible, and successful student looks like, as well as the expectations the school had for their students. For Ms. Luna, not only are teen parents mature, they also have more motivation than non-parenting teens to be on track and graduate. Hence, maturity as a frame of reference was further reinforced through parenthood. As evidenced by other studies, this is not an isolated case, as motherhood is often understood as a clear indication of adulthood, which automatically merits maturity. For instance, Kaplan (1996, 1997) and Dietrich (1998) have pointed out how becoming a parent affords teen mothers a recognition of maturity among their peers and with adults in their families, communities, and to some extent, with their teachers. Thus, motherhood as a gendered construct organized Ms. Luna's relationships with her mothering students, positioning them favorably in the eyes of teachers and the school. Indeed, as it will be explored in the next chapter, during my time there it was a mothering student who would be designated as "student of the month" in recognition of her efforts to individually and swiftly earn a large number of credits.

However, when it came to Darlene, Ms. Luna's labeling system was applied in contradictory ways because although Darlene is a mother, she was also an 8th grader who exhibited the common behaviors of non-parenting 8th graders who are too "hyper." Due to her vocal and often disruptive behavior, Ms. Luna labeled Darlene as immature, even though she is a mother. What this example shows is that while the school can modify the ways in which students can be evaluated (in this case, the way teen pregnancy did not limit students' access to education), this transformation can be limited when other

normative evaluations of femininity and masculinity are not questioned nor modified. In regards to Darlene's behavior in class and the ways in which Ms. Luna interacted with Darlene compared to the rest of the students, it is important to recognize gender as a major contributing factor in how Ms. Luna shaped her understanding of who qualifies as mature and immature. As mentioned earlier, the 8th grade science class tends to become a competition of who can garner the most attention from peers and the teacher. The boys in the classroom outnumber the females, and they are quite skilled with the practice of yelling out answers and questions to the teachers. In my time observing Ms. Luna's class, the boys' rambunctiousness elicited redirection from Ms. Luna, however she also remained attentive and responsive to the needs of the boys. When I observed this, it was not entirely surprising because education scholars have long noted that young men tend to be called on more than girls in PK-12 classrooms, and teachers tend to be more concerned about boys' level of engagement in class linking their "rowdiness" and "hyperactivity" to boredom that teachers urgently feel compelled to address in the classroom (Bailey et al., 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1986, 1995; Sadker, Sadker, & Klein, 1991; Sadker, Sadker, & Steindam, 1989). Scholars have also noted that teachers may articulate a strong belief system in gender equality, but their teaching practices indicate otherwise as they may still stereotype students based on gender and give more attention to boys over girls (Garrahy, 2003).

Because they recognized Ms. Luna was giving them less attention, two of the young women in the classroom, Darlene and a non-mothering student named Carmela, struck up an even match with the young men who were vocal and demanded attention.

Darlene, in particular, often out-competed the young men because she successfully used the "fag discourse" (a term developed by sociologist C.J. Pascoe when she observed how male students bounced around the label "fag" among them to engage in gender play) to pick on her male peers and alter power dynamics (Pascoe, 2011). For instance, when students were watching a movie in class, there were intimate moments in which a father and son collaborated in creating a rocket for a science fair. The young men were highly engaged and seldom made a peep, unless they had questions for the teacher about the movie. Darlene used the opportunity to interrupt the young men's attention to make homophobic remarks regarding the men's intimate caring relationships on screen. She disregarded the fact that the two characters were in fact father and son by yelling out, "They're gay!" Upon more careful study, I began to realize that Darlene often resorted to these tactics in order to mark her presence among her male peers in order to make sure that she received the attention she needed from the teacher to successfully complete her assignments and understand new material.

Another example of this behavior aimed at disrupting gender dynamics was seen when Darlene kept asking Ms. Luna whether she could read her summary. Ms. Luna refused, yet when a male student demanded to do the same, Ms. Luna was more likely to hear them out. Darlene eventually decided to walk to the teacher's desk so that her summary would be read, and even then, she received minimal feedback. The young men's loud and disruptive behavior was expected and a given for Ms. Luna as she practiced more patience with their "immature" behavior that is often wrapped up a "boys will be boys" discourse. Feminist scholars (Gavey, 2005; Leahy, 1994; Martin, 2002)

have noted a prevalent "boys will be boys" discourse that dominates mainstream ideas of boys and young men's gender and sexuality. This discourse summons taken-for-granted norms of young men's behavior as innately aggressive and hyperactive, so when they are aggressive and loud in their tactics to get a teacher's attention, it is not seen as a big deal. One caveat to this research is that white boys get away with disruptive behavior more often than boys of color, who under certain contexts can actually be interpreted to be too disruptive to the point of being considered criminal (Chavez, 2013; Hurtado et al, Malagon, 2010; Noguera & Hurtado, 2012), but on average even boys of color have been documented to get more de facto attention from teachers. On the other hand, young women and girls are expected to exhibit traditional ideals of femininity (passivity and obedience), so the same behavior would have a different effect on the teacher's response. Moreover, teachers often see boys as naturally more energetic and therefore in need of accommodations for their "rambunctious" behaviors, whereas young women and girls are expected to behave quietly and without disrupting others (Garrahy, 2003). With Darlene, therefore, Ms. Luna had less patience and she was often judged at a harsher level than the young men *and* other women in the class because her ways of trying to get Ms. Luna's attention were in conflict with gendered expectations of passive and quiet female students (Garrahy, 2003; Gavey, 2005; Leahy, 1994; Martin, 2002; Tolman, 2009; Tolman et. al., 2003).

Darlene's active engagement with the class and the teacher was evaluated as subverting gendered expectations and assumptions of how boys and girls should behave in class. Thus, Ms. Luna invoked appropriate feminine behaviors as a disciplining effort

and imposed these gendered and sexualized expectations on Darlene by noting her low-cut top (something she didn't do with other students wearing similar clothes), which is a disciplining strategy often documented in studies of Latina students (Garcia, 2012; Hyams, 2011). Whether Ms. Luna learned to do this because she is aware of mainstream ideas of harsher evaluation of Mexican women's sexuality in the U.S. (Chavez, 2013; Garcia, 2009, 2012; Gutiérrez, 2008) or she did it subconsciously because Mexican women learn that success rests on "respectable" ways of expressing or suppressing sexuality (Bettie, 2000, 2014; Garcia, 2009, 2012; Hyams, 2011), in the end what is clear is that Ms. Luna's evaluative lens of her students was rife with gendered expectations. Additionally, according to Ms. Luna's frame of reference, Darlene is also a mother, so she should especially exhibit more mature, and by the same token, feminine behavior that abides by a structured and efficient work ethic.

From my vantage point, Darlene seemed like an engaged student who longed for the same level of attention the boys were getting from Ms. Luna without much effort. For Ms. Luna, it became difficult to see that compared to most of the students in class, Darlene was actually highly engaged and preoccupied with finishing her work. Ms. Luna's gendered interpretive lens, which is not unique to Ms. Luna (refer to Chapter 2), made it difficult for her to see the nuances of Darlene's behavior. This limited the extent to which Ms. Luna could develop a more productive, caring, and supportive relationship with this mothering student, while at the same time modifying her teaching practices in a way that would not reinforce gendered power dynamics in the classroom.

In regards to the interplay between school culture and teacher pedagogies, RGV School enabled Ms. Luna to practice pedagogics of care with the mothering students by accommodating their needs (like providing extended time with work, finding ways to give them daily work credit in class through bell ringers, and modifying her plans for her class despite the fast-paced curriculum), yet the gendered lens through which she interpreted her students' behavior also influenced her teaching practices to create contradictions in her ethics of care. This points out that when teachers may not have the resources to think about gender and sexuality critically, gender norms seep into teacher-student interactions in ways that may curtail the care work the school culture and structure may espouse. Hence, infusing critical ways of thinking about gender and sexuality for teachers may help further reinforce pedagogies of care from the teachers and the schooling structure in which they work (the implications of this point will be further explored in the conclusion).

Elva, Susana, and Esperanza as "Model" Students

Darlene, however, was not the only mothering student in Ms. Luna's 8th grade science class. Elva was another student who frequently missed class due to doctor appointments because she was pregnant at the time; however, when she was in class she was also highly engaged and she regularly conversed with Ms. Luna about missing assignments and her current grade. Unlike Darlene, Elva was quiet and mostly kept to herself since her main concern was to finish school. Elva was also taking Mrs. Santos' class at the time of my study. I noticed that unlike Darlene and the rest of the students, especially the male students, Elva often took the initiative to check with the teacher

everyday to see what assignments she was missing, or what more she could study to pass her tests in class. I never heard her raise her voice out loud or demand attention from the rest of the students, instead she focused on her work, ate snacks, asked to go to the bathroom several times, and occasionally laughed at her peers from amusement. Her method for keeping to herself often involved putting on her headphones and sitting close to the front and of the class with her back facing the rest of the students. She also frequently walked up to the teachers' desk to quietly make sure she was on the right track with her work. Her strategies to get the most out of Ms. Luna were vastly different from Darlene, and as a result, Elva was never classified as one of the "immature" 8th graders. Instead she qualified as a mature teen mother who "had it in her head" to get her credits and graduate.

Similarly, in Ms. Luna's 4th period Biology classroom, Susana and Esperanza were also highly efficient and attentive to what grade they were maintaining in the class. They also frequently checked in with Ms. Luna, and they too, mostly kept to themselves in regards to working diligently and finishing all their work in a timely manner. However, unlike Elva who mostly worked individually due to Darlene's highly independent and subversive style (in Ms. Luna's 6th period class), Susana and Esperanza (in Ms. Luna's 4th period class) often worked together as they shared snacks, notes, and filled in on what the other was missing if either one of them missed the class before. They had a more team-like approach in how they successfully navigated their tasks. They often sat right next to each other, and they purposefully sat right in front of the teacher's desk so that they could easily turn and ask her questions. They also strategically used the desktops to

complete their bell ringers and class projects that involved the use of computers. In an interview, Esperanza made it clear to me that she did not like to use the laptops because they are slow and they often do not work well. Hence, I would either see them sitting right next to one another in their desks or at the table with the desktops at the side of the room. The only time I saw them work separately was when they worked on a class biome project that lasted almost a week. After one of the classes in which they worked on their projects, Ms. Luna wondered why they didn't choose to work together since she offered them the chance to do so, but I understood that they chose to work separately because Susana was due in a matter of days, so if she left then it would be up to Esperanza to do the rest. In order to keep things simpler they decided to do their projects separately. Indeed, two days into the project Susana began home schooling because she had given birth to her new baby. In the meantime, Esperanza continued to attend each class to work diligently on her class project.

I noticed that Esperanza spoke a lot more in Ms. Luna's class compared to Mrs. Santos' class. For Esperanza it was easy to talk to Ms. Luna and she constantly asked for help and guidance from Ms. Luna. Like Elva, Esperanza was highly respectful and quietly asked for help, rather than yelling and demanding attention like Darlene often did in 6th period. This mode of asking for help and assistance certainly worked in Esperanza's favor, because it matched up with Ms. Luna's interpretive lens for what makes a responsible and mature student, as well what the school as an institution identified as a "model" student (more in Chapter 6). Moreover, because the Biology class was composed of older students, Ms. Luna was much more at ease and comfortable

interacting with students because they were more "mature" and less "hyper." This context also greatly worked in Esperanza and Susana's favor. Additionally, Esperanza, Elva and Susana, exhibited quiet and obedient behaviors that lined up with idealized traits of femininity that young women and girls are often expected to demonstrate in school and wider society (Bettie, 2000, 2014; Garcia 2009, 2012; Garrahy, 2003; Gavey, 2005; Hyams, 2011; Leahy, 1994; Martin, 2002; Tolman, 2009; Tolman et. al., 2003).

The ways in which these three mothering students were positioned as mature students, by Ms. Luna at an institutional level by the school, highlights how ideas of maturity are wrapped with traditional notions of femininity that are especially amplified through the role of motherhood. While these taken-for-granted understandings worked in these young women's favor to help them do well in their classes and graduate (an opportunity they did not find in their prior school in which they were positioned as "bad" students), this same interpretive lens did not work as well for mothering students like Darlene. Her gender, and even sexual expressions (invoking the "fag discourse" and her low-cut top), positioned her differently with Ms. Luna creating a different set of pedagogical responses that were more about correcting behavior, rather than providing assistance.

However, it is important to point out that Ms. Luna, like many other teachers, resort to this interpretive gendered lens when their teaching practices and self-reflective praxis does not encompass a critical lens in regards to gender and sexuality. While Ms. Luna's intent was to help her students stay on track, the ways in which she went about accomplishing this goal took on gendered, and even ageist (younger students or students

who exhibit unbounded curiosity like younger students are considered immature), tones that created differential pedagogical interactions. This seemed to contradict her goal for treating all students the same.

A Closer Look at Esperanza

In an interview with Esperanza, she commented that she greatly enjoyed her Biology class because she felt that Ms. Luna never gave up on helping Esperanza understand the content in class:

> G.R.: So how do you get along with Ms. Luna?
>
> E: I really get along with her. I didn't get along with my other Biology teacher before.
>
> G.R.: No?
>
> E: I guess to like, [my past Biology] would explain me and then like [the teacher would] get mad cuz I wouldn't understand. And [Ms. Luna] she'll be there until I understand what she is talking about. Until I get it. She's a really helpful teacher.
>
> G.R.: How do you feel in her class?
>
> E: Smart. (slight laugh) Cuz I never could like, I failed Biology [before]. I don't really like science. But this time like I actually found an interest.

Esperanza further expressed that because of her developing confidence and interest in science, she was looking into pursuing a career in the health sciences because she wanted to merge her goal of helping people with her new interest in the sciences. During class, I noticed that Esperanza enthusiastically participated in whole group activities, especially Bingo because it was a great way for her to show off how much she had learned in class.

During one game of Bingo in which students reviewed their vocabulary, Esperanza outshined the rest of the student as she fired away the correct answers. Ms. Luna even commented on her performance, "Esperanza, you're on fire today!" To this acknowledgement Esperanza smiled and continued to fire away responses.

When I asked Esperanza what she thought was especially supportive and caring about Ms. Luna, she interestingly responded that Ms. Luna's pushiness for students to finish their work and abide by a structured timeline was especially helpful:

> E: Uh, she explains it more than twice, so like we can be on pace. And she'll be there like, with us like, well…you gotta do this, you gotta like, she's like strict, like, so we can like be good and we could pass our test. And she'll make us study and stuff like that, even though we don't like studying, but…
>
> G.R.: And strict in what way, I think you said strict.
>
> E: Like, like, like, I don't know I guess she wants it to be right, to be like, on a certain day, and if it's not… she'll probably give us like an extra day, but we have to be like in her pace, like so we won't stay behind her class.

Esperanza pointed out that while Ms. Luna gives students extra time to finish their assignments, what is especially helpful about Ms. Luna is her strictness and pushiness for students to finish their work. Esperanza thought she greatly benefited from the structure and time frames that Ms. Luna provided students to stay on track because it nicely fit in with Esperanza's agenda to get her credits and graduate. For Esperanza, like the rest of the mothering students in this study, it was urgent for them to finish school, so any kind of care and support that helps them keep on track was certainly appreciated. This goal-

oriented and efficient work ethic is what makes most of the mothering students at RGV School stand out. They were often perceived by teachers as the most engaged and mature students in the school; setting a good example for their non-parenting peers to follow. This positioning of mothering students was very different from how they were perceived in their prior homeschools where they were on the verge of dropping out.

No Room for Curiosity: Ms. Luna's Style Matched Mothering Students Agenda

Although mothering students are often perceived as model students because of their efficient work ethic and goal-oriented mindset to graduate high school as soon as possible and pursue higher education, this same efficiency style comes at a cost of curiosity. As discussed previously, Ms. Luna's labeling of mature vs. immature students rests a great deal on how well students stick to the agenda of doing whatever it takes to pass their classes, earn their credits, and graduate. Students who show less maturity are those who ask questions or engage in practices that express curiosity. For instance, when the Biology students were working on their taxonomy projects, several of the students became intrigued upon finding pictures of hybrid animals that belong to more than one taxonomic category of genus and species. Rather than following up on the student's interest and questions regarding these odd animals, Ms. Luna preferred to avoid their questions and asked them to focus on the assignment. For Ms. Luna, it was urgent that students get as much done as possible because they can be absent the next day and consequently fall behind. Ms. Luna deeply cared about the well being of her students as she has expressed in the interview. She often thinks about their unstable home situations or their trouble with the law, and responsibilities they have in their personal lives, so she

pushed her students to stay on task so that they don't fall further behind. The teen mothers abide by this mode of caring at a greater rate than the rest of the older and "mature" students, but at the same time it limits students' interests in learning more outside of the curriculum. While several of the Biology students looked up pictures of hybrid animals, Esperanza and Susana were not very interested in pursuing this side interest, and instead they focused on doing the project "right." Their proactive engagement entailed checking in with the teacher to make sure they were doing their projects correctly every step of the way.

COMPLEXITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS

Ms. Luna's relationships and interactions with her students are highly contradictory and complex. Although she likes to keep structure, limits students' curiosity, labels her students as immature or mature, and pushes her students to keep on track, her intentions come from a place of deep concern for her student's well being. She worries a great deal about the progress of her students, and she does everything in her power to maintain order by keeping the students focused on the goals of the lesson and deadlines for assignments in each class. However, she has also shown a more personal and human side of herself by expressing her Mexicaness to students either in subtle ways, through her heavy accent or mispronunciation of words, or in overt ways like she did with the music in her 4th period Biology students. Among mothering students, she tends to be a favorite teacher, which was made clear to me when they frequently marked her as a favorite teacher on a document in which they wrote their class schedules. As Esperanza shared, Ms. Luna's structured style and strictness fit well with their goal-oriented and

efficient work ethic. They liked how Ms. Luna balanced out flexibility, by giving extra time on assignments, and structure, by providing a time frame by which to keep track of their grades and credits. For Darlene's gender-subversive style, however, complicated the happy partnership between the efficient goal-oriented work ethic of mothering students and Ms. Luna's strict style. Darlene was focused on finishing her assignments and understanding the content just as much as the rest of the mothering students in the two science classes I observed, but her loud and demanding tone and attitude colored Ms. Luna's interpretive lens, thereby compelling her to deem Darlene as "immature." This labeling interfered with Ms. Luna's ability to work more closely with Darlene in a way that was less dismissive.

Still, before Darlene transferred out of RGV School and moved out of town, she gravitated a lot towards Ms. Luna and often searched for validation and acknowledgement from Ms. Luna, which she often received nonetheless when Ms. Luna laughed at her jokes, responded to her questions, and provided plenty of assistance. Some days Ms. Luna had less patience than others, especially when she got sick and was bogged down with renewing her work visa, so Darlene would sometimes be dismissed. But other days, Ms. Luna worked more closely with Darlene and gave into some of Darlene's curiosity regarding Ms. Luna's personal life. This is the sort of dance that Ms. Luna maintained with several of her students, but even though the interactions could differ from day to day, two things remained consistent: 1) her structured style, and 2) her willingness to listen to her students' problems and provide the flexibility they needed to complete their assignments and projects, and perform well on their tests. When I asked

her what her relationships with her students were like, she provided the following self-description, which sums up Ms. Luna's complexity and underlying connection with her students:

What is my relationship with them? Well I try…at first of course they see, they look at me like oh my god, very strict teacher, no feelings, you know. Very demanding, very mean teacher! But, as they start knowing me they have, I have a really good relationship with a lot of them, sometimes we, you know, within limits, joke around, they can talk, they come to me and actually talk…oh my mom this and that, my dad this and that. My dad had an affair with…you know a lot of stuff like oh I don't need to know this, but they get to a point that they trust you so much so that they just talk a lot to you.

"YOU HAVE TO BE A MOTHER, YOU HAVE TO BE A FRIEND": MS. LUNA GRAPPLES WITH HER ROLE AS A TEACHER

During my interview with Ms. Luna, she revealed several personal stories she had learned from her students during her time as a science teacher at RGV School. It struck me that she knew so much about her students given her "let's get to business" approach in class. I learned that several students felt comfortable sharing their personal lives with her between classes, as well as before and after school. Also, I realized that all those times I witnessed students blurt out their bits of their personal lives during class, Ms. Luna was actually listening even though it seemed she was not, based on her short and impersonal statements. Ms. Luna was fully aware of her students' personal lives, however she was also overwhelmed and she felt underprepared in knowing how to offer helpful guidance and advice for her students.

The following statement from Ms. Luna exemplifies her difficulty with knowing exactly how to help her students who go through difficult situations:

> I think my major area [for improvement is to learn] how to motivate students who have a lot of issues…in their personal lives…[like abuse]. I really don't know what to say, you know, maybe [that's] more in the counseling area? Because we can say yes it's gonna be better…but they might not feel it, because their experiences are different. So [the] major area [I want] to improve is to get them motivated. [I] want to know exactly what to do when the student speaks up and says you know, uh, I was raped when I was 12 years old. What do you say to that? I really don't know how to react to that. So, [it's] those types of things [that] they don't teach you…when you are in school to be a teacher…You have to be a mother, you have to be a friend, a teacher, you have to be a role model, you have to be a, you know [a] shoulder. You have to be a lot of stuff. And…I'm not prepared!

Ms. Luna struggled greatly to put into words what she was trying to say about violence and other sensitive topics in the lives of her students. She explained that her teacher preparation program did not teach her how to handle topics such as rape and abuse with her students, so it was difficult for her to articulate precisely what she needed to know in order to help or "motivate" her students. More specifically, she wanted to grasp exactly how to provide advice and support to a student who has gone through or going through abuse, especially because this is a reality that is out of her immediate control.

During her interview, Ms. Luna talked quite a bit about what her role as a teacher should be in helping a student feel empowered and to turn to education as means for healing and overcoming complex social situations. She had a hunch that, as an educator, she can play a role in providing students with the tools to become empowered and continue their education. Although she was speaking about students' "personal" lives, she did not relegate their private concerns as something that belongs outside of school like other teachers have been shown to do in traditional schools (Valenzuela, 1999) she clearly understood that the private lives of students are important to think about and address in school. She pondered the notion of whether her lack of preparation should be thought of as a counselor's concern and therefore relegated outside the purview of an educator's job description, but then she dismissed that idea when she stated a teacher is a mother, friend, role model, and most simply "a shoulder" to lean on. Within the context of RGV School, nestled among like-minded teachers, Ms. Luna understood her job much more holistically than the average teacher, and she greatly lamented that her teacher education program did not fully prepare her with the tools to fulfill multiple roles as an educator.

CONCLUSION

At first glance, Ms. Luna's teaching style may resemble that of a teacher in a traditional school, but through a Chicana feminist analysis that enabled me to make sense of the contradictions I witnessed, I soon realized that Ms. Luna was adopting pedagogies and teaching practices that she thought were most effective with helping her students progress and finish high school. Her inner teacher core was one that was loaded with

genuine care; she was highly aware of her students' complex lives and the unique hardships they faced, so she accessed whatever pedagogical tools were at her disposal in order to best serve their needs.

However, as I pointed out in the last portrait about her self-professed limitations, she also knew that she was not prepared to help her students in a way that could be much more empowering and transformative. She articulated this in regards to her lack of knowledge with how to help students when they come to her with personal stories of abuse, but in this chapter, I looked beyond her words to note how her teaching practices also exhibit shortcomings in her pedagogical toolkit. Although she acted from a genuine teacher core of care, her aesthetic-like pedagogical strategies, her gendered and ageist practices of labeling students, and her tendency to refrain from unveiling her Mexicaness created missed opportunities for her to more powerfully engage with her students. Yet the context in which she worked, an alternative school based on validating students' personal lives and providing the individualized support they need, enabled the students to adopt humanizing interpretations of Ms. Luna and connect with her in ways she was not aware. This shows that school context and structure play a major role in how students read their teachers.

When Ms. Luna occasionally let her guard down and expressed her Mexicaness openly, students gravitated towards her even more and easily forged a sense of community in her classroom. Yet this classroom community is fraught with gendered power dynamics. Feminist literature has documented how these power dynamics play out if educators do not consciously intervene to change them (Bettie, 2000, 2014; Garcia,

2009, 2012; Garrahy, 2003; Gavey, 2005; Hyams 2000). Students themselves will enact power in ways that can deter further community building between them, so although teachers like Ms. Luna want to treat students "the same," there is a need for educators to take on a critical stance in regards to gender and sexuality so students' interpretation and reproduction of normative gender power dynamics do not take over at the expense of community or the dismissal of some students. Ms. Luna's interactions with the mothering students, in particular, revealed how girls and young women's expression of femininity is commonly evaluated to position them as a certain kind of student, in this case, mature or immature.

Feminist scholars have also pointed out how Latina girls and young women in particular can fall into hypersexualized gendered and sexual stereotypes if they do not enact femininity in socially sanctioned ways (Bettie, 2000, 2014; Chavez, 2013; Garcia, 2009, 2012; Gutiérrez, 2008; Hyams, 2011). Teachers often label such students as "immature" or "bad" students, thereby curtailing opportunities for teachers to spend more time with them to provide academic support. Darlene, in particular, often sought Ms. Luna's attention and aid, however her subversive gender style prompted Ms. Luna to overlook Darlene. Instead, Ms. Luna's uncritical acceptance of the "boys will be boys" discourse compelled her to more readily address male students' concerns even though they also spoke out of turn like Darlene. This compelled Darlene to enter a power struggle with her male peers invoking the "fag discourse" to shut them down. These gendered power dynamics created contradictions in Ms. Luna's teaching practices. She wanted to treat students the same, but she uncritically reinforced gendered norms by

rewarding the mothering students that upheld traditional feminine behaviors of maturity, as well as by not disciplining boys who spoke out of turn or acted in "immature" ways.

Ms. Luna not only thought of herself as a teacher, as she articulated in the interview, she also thought of herself as a role model, a mother or simply a shoulder to lean on. She genuinely cared about her students, so the contradictions and limitations in her teaching practices and pedagogies are not a reflection of individual blame. Instead, her humanity in her craft provides opportunities for teacher educators and educations scholars to point out what educators need in their pedagogical toolkit to not only meet the unique needs of historically disenfranchised youth, like teen mothers, but to also trouble taken-for-granted norms that curtail transformative learning opportunities.

Chapter 6: "We've got to give them everything that we possibly can to help!": Mrs. Richardson's Self-Paced Module Class

When I think of Mrs. Richardson's 7th period and 8th period classes, I visualize a central hub, like an international airport, in which students landed, settled in, and left at different times throughout the semester based on which credit they were completing—Speech, Theatre, or English (I, II, III, or IV). Much like each individual plane in a major airport hub, each student had a different trajectory, schedule, agenda, and pacing that they follow separately from everyone else. And like an airport hub in which different planes belong to different airlines, each student comes in from a different grade level, based on the number of credits they have completed at RGV School. Both classes were composed of students whose ages ranged from 14 to 19 years, they were male and female, and some were parents and others were not, providing a diverse mix of students to observe.

Mrs. Richardson's classes also resembled an international airport hub because she was in charge of several courses, so her role mirrored the personnel found in an air traffic control tower. She directed incoming students to their stations and introduced them to the set of modules that they needed to complete in order to receive their credit. Depending on the course, a certain number of modules needed to be completed, each with their own number of assignments and projects. Hence, the classes were self-paced with a set-up that was highly individualized. Each student had their own work and they shaped their timeline according to their own goals. Mrs. Richardson's prime mission was to ensure that the students had the materials, support, care, motivation, and instruction they needed to complete their credit(s) and graduate high school. This included directing the flow of

books, modules, supplies, and laptops, and iPads that students needed to complete their work. Moreover, Mrs. Richardson's class was all about individual choice and assignments were modified according to students' preference and interests. Her class stood in stark contrast to Mrs. Santos' and Ms. Luna's classes, in which students were obligated to be on the same timeline and complete the same assignments and projects. So what does it look like when mothering students are placed in a classroom environment that is highly individualized and self-paced? What do the pedagogical interactions and relationships between Mrs. Richardson and the (mothering) students look like as each student works on their own set of assignments?

In this chapter, I present portraits that exemplify what a typical day looks like in this classroom hub, and how different mothering students responded to Mrs. Richardson's classroom set-up and her pedagogical interactions. While some mothering students worked well in this central hub, others had some trouble adjusting to this structure. For example, some did not feel as comfortable asking Mrs. Richardson for help as they did in other classes. In the portraits I also address typical gender dynamics that unfold in the classroom when the structure leaves a lot of room for students to direct the pace of the class, as well as culturally relevant strategies that Mrs. Richardson employed to further personalize the modules for her students. Finally, I discuss what the mothering students specifically found supportive and caring about Mrs. Richardson's instructional practices by focusing on what they shared in the interviews.

A HOME-LIKE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT BASED ON WARMTH AND INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

The first time I went by to observe Mrs. Richardson's class, I immediately felt welcomed even before I entered the room. As I walked through a dimly lit hallway and approached the bright light emanating from the door (which usually remained open), it was a like a light at the end of a tunnel. The room was bursting with bright colors, warmth, and light that splashed into the darker lit hallway right outside the door. The luminosity initially made me think there were huge windows in the room allowing sunshine and heat to spread throughout it and out the doorway. However, as I passed by the heavily decorated classroom door with butcher paper and posters, including one huge "welcome" poster running vertically on the door, I looked around for the windows responsible for the heat and the light, only to find every single wall covered with more posters, butcher paper, decorations, book shelves, tables with plants, and cabinets covered with even more decorations. Several of the posters that hung the walls were titled "READ" with pictures of various fictional characters and celebrities holding a book and looking at the viewer as if to motivate them to read. One of the fictional characters that stood out from the others was Yoda, a small green character from the Star Wars movie saga, holding a book with a misty swamp as the background. There was also a giant banner that stood out to me with giant letters, "Turn the pages of your imagination, and pick up a book to READ!" Other posters were giant pictures of canonical books in British Literature, like *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as several book titles from contemporary American Literature. There were also maps of various parts of the world, along with picturesque landscapes. Fabrics and several trinkets hung from the walls, and even

Christmas themed ornaments were hanging from the ceiling as they glistening and reflected light from the classroom's fluorescent lights.

After scanning the walls and the ceiling of the room, my eyes were eventually drawn to the teacher's desk at the opposite corner of the room with a desktop computer accompanied by stacks of paper, plants, pictures, and other small knick-knacks. Behind the teachers' desk, I finally located the windows I was looking for, but they were not as huge as I imagined them. Instead, they were small and hardly responsible for all the light and warmth in the room. I quickly realized the colorful posters, decorations, and butcher paper were mostly responsible for bouncing light around the space. The light was amplified as it bounced off the splashes of pastel colors, laminated posters, and even tinsel. I also came to find out that the low AC setting in the room was responsible for the warmth in the room, along with the humidity that somehow snuck in from the outside semi-tropical climate of the Rio Grande Valley (even in November). Perhaps Mrs. Richardson sometimes cracked open her small windows to let some fresh air in? Warmth, light, and color were essential ingredients for creating a welcoming and inviting room with a bright ambiance to motivate students and spark their curiosity through pictures of far away places and books that invoked imagination.

Once I took in the sights, I scanned the room once again to locate Mrs. Richardson; I quickly looked around the room and noticed that student desks were organized in a loose oval formation. Most of the students were sitting at the desks working on their laptops, while others were using books and other documents to complete work packets called modules. However, some of the students were working on the

desktop computers that were setup on the other side of the room up against the wall. I noticed there was no clear definition of where the front and back end of the room was located. The space was more of a colorful frame in which students' individual work was a mosaic – the centerpiece of the room's activity – alongside a few students working on the desktops across the teacher's desk. I eventually located Mrs. Richardson helping out one student at his desk. I didn't want to interrupt, so I tiptoed my way straight across the doorway along the margin of the student desks. I carefully made my way to a an empty chair next to a cart designed to store laptops, and as I took each step I made sure not to trip on any extension chords or laptop chargers that were scattered all around the floor. The chords seemed to run in every direction a plug was found along the walls or power strips on the floor.

The classroom maps out the contours of Mrs. Richardson's pedagogical approach.

In this first portrait about one of my initial visits to Mrs. Richardson's classroom, I point out the classroom structure and aesthetic appearance, which ultimately mapped out this teacher's approach and style with interacting with her students. The overwhelming light, warmth, color, charm, and home-like feel of the class felt welcoming creating a sense of belonging in the classroom. Not only are the students welcomed into her classroom, but they were also her centerpieces of the room, or the focal point of her attention. Mrs. Richardson set up the room in a way that prioritized the following for her students: (1) individualized attention, (2) personalized assignments to students' interests, (3) accommodations for individual needs, and (4) motivation for all students to work diligently to finish their modules and gain their credits for graduation. In the following

sections I showcase some more portraits that go further into what these pedagogical priorities looked like for Mrs. Richardson and her students.

Rolling her way around the room; Mrs. Richardson provides individualized assistance

Mrs. Richardson was standing right outside her door as she usually did at the start of her 8th period class. In an interview, she explained to me that it is important for her to stand outside her door during each passing period because it was not only school policy, but she liked to greet students as they walked in her room. For her it was critical to make sure each student felt welcomed into her room. She also liked to greet other students who walked by her room as they made their way to another teacher's classroom because she liked to extend the cozy atmosphere of her classroom out into the hallway to brighten up other students' days. Standing outside of her doorway was also her way of making sure that students made it into their classrooms in a timely manner, especially since there was no tardy bell. Once Mrs. Richardson felt satisfied with doorway duty, she walked right into the room and asked her usual question, "Ok, what are we working on?" About thirteen students shuffled around the room to grab a laptop out of the cart, retrieve their folders and module packets, and choose a desk to sit at for the day. Some students, as usual, took their time to get situated while they checked their cell phones.

Throughout the rest of the classroom period, I carefully watched Mrs. Richardson make her way around the room to check on student progress, provide assistance, answer questions, and motivate students to keep working. Although most students were working on their assignments, others were distracted with their cell phones, some fell asleep, and

others were quietly talking to their neighbor and distracted from the work that was waiting to be completed on their desks. In order to encourage students to keep working, she often placed her hand on students' backs or shoulders to wake them up and ask them if they needed to take a quick walk or drink some water. She would also redirect students who were distracted from their work by going by their desk and inquiring about their progress or providing context to their assignment or project in order to start a conversation that she hoped could spark their interest. In other words, Mrs. Richardson's movement throughout the classroom consisted of standing outside the oval of desks to call on student names to check on them or redirect them, and walking to and from the oval of students desks and her desk as she multi-tasked between monitoring the students and working on paperwork and other matters at her desk.

As I wrote down my observations of Mrs. Richardson's movements around the room, I noticed that there was a rolling chair at the center of the student desks and I wondered why the chair was placed at the center of the oval. A little over half-way through the class I witnessed Mrs. Richardson sitting in the chair rolling her way to several students' desks to monitor their progress and answer any of their questions. I looked down at the floor to see whether there were any chords that could get in the way, but instead, I found that there were hardly any chords in the center of the oval since most plugs, extension chords, and power strips were mostly under the student desks and around the oval of desks. The desks and chords were arranged so that Mrs. Richardson could easily position herself in the center of the desk and roll from one student to the next freely, so that she could shape her role in the classroom as the primary purveyor of

assistance, guidance, resources, conversation, and even advise. As one student expressed frustration openly about his assignment, Mrs. Richardson rolled over to him to comfort him and say, “Don’t get frustrated, if you get frustrated come talk to me or try a different strategy.” After spending some time with the frustrated student, she rolled over to check on another student who had fallen asleep to further encourage him to keep working, and then she rolled to another student after she called out “Miss!” and asked a question about one of the directions on her handout. As Mrs. Richardson rolled from one desk to another, I eventually noticed that two students actually seemed to be working on the same assignment about Shakespeare when Mrs. Richardson approached them to talk about the historical context of “his time.” She asked them to imagine what that looked like as they researched their assigned topic and analyzed their findings. She motivated the students to collaborate on this process and then come up with a sketch that encompassed his life in relation to his surroundings. It was interesting to see that even though the students were in charge of their own progress with their individual modules, Mrs. Richardson fostered opportunities for some collaborative work with certain assignments.

In fact, I came to find out that Mrs. Richardson didn’t have the students do exactly what the modules instructed; instead she often modified the assignments to suit individual student interests and skill sets. For instance, if the module asked students to write a book report, she was open to students creating a “movie trailer” about the book, and then write up a explanation regarding the process of creating the trailer and why they chose to focus on certain plot points from the book. This was her way to encourage students to dig deeply into the meaning and structure of the book, while engaging their

creativity in how they choose to present the book to an audience. If a certain assignment was conducive to a collaborative project, then she offered the opportunity for students to work as partners, especially if she noticed that certain students would benefit from working with a peer. However, I soon learned that working with a partner was not common, especially because student attendance at RGV School seemed sporadic and inconsistent. I understood that there was a certain level of risk with having students work in groups on a long-term project if their attendance was irregular, and sometimes students could stop attending RGV School if they moved away, go back to their home school, or simply stop attending school altogether due to extenuating circumstances in their personal lives. Also, students in Mrs. Richardson's class were working on different course credits and were at different points in their modules, so moments in which students overlapped along their work trajectory was rare and far in between. In light of the limitations, Mrs. Richardson mostly modified the assignments for students on an individual basis, and the structure of the classroom revolved around the individual progress of each student with very little chance for group work. Collaboration seemed more like a bonus than the core of Mrs. Richardson's classroom structure, and her pedagogical interactions revolved around individualized assistance and guidance for her students as they worked on their own agenda. She was also the purveyor of encouragement, motivation, and support among the students as she rolled from one student to the next to check on their progress.

Towards the end of class, students began to close laptops, log out of the desktops, gather their modules and materials, and put away some of their paperwork into their own

personal manila folders in a crate located by the desktops. One student confessed to Mrs. Richardson that he took his folder in his car because he had taken it home to work on some of his assignments. As Mrs. Richardson began to investigate the chances of him getting back his folder, she giggled, creating some comic relief for what may have been a serious situation if it meant the student may fall behind. Instead of getting upset, Mrs. Richardson focused on assessing the gravity of the issue and whether he could get his folder back safely. Her nurturing approach and strategy for comic relief through her giggle stood out to me as a method of patience and support, and in subsequent visits, I soon came to realize that her bubbly and bright giggle would become her trademark. I couldn't help but smile every time I heard her chirpy giggle, quickly followed by her positive remarks that things will be okay. Her chirpiness and positivity matched her bright and encouraging room.

Classroom structure and pedagogy revolves around individual needs

In this portrait I demonstrated how Mrs. Richardson moved around the classroom to motivate her students, check in on their progress, explain assignments, and even change the assignments in the modules so that it better fits the needs of the students. Although the modules were supposed to be done by each individual student, Mrs. Richardson was opened to having some collaboration between students, if their situations allowed for collaborations to happen in a way that did not impact each student's progress in the class. Mrs. Richardson teaching goals was to provide accommodations, modifications, and flexibility for her students, so her interactions of care and support revolved around these strategies. Her interactions with the students also radiated charm

and warmth much like the classroom environment she created. She fostered a quiet ambience of ease, tranquility, and warmth to help the students focus on their work, however, the silence was often punctuated with giggles and chuckles to humanize the space and create a friendly atmosphere.

Although Mrs. Richardson rolled from one place to the next to explain the assignments to the students and modifying their modules, she "rolled out" her assistance along gendered lines in which the male students received more attention than their female counterparts. Also, the young women, especially the mothering students, were much more focused and in-tune with their progress in their modules. For instance, in the next portrait, I present Kira (a mothering student) who is not only in-tune with her progress, but she also carefully plans her work trajectory and creates deadlines for herself in order to finish her modules by a certain time. This diligence, planning, and concentration was demonstrated much more often by the young women, which compelled Mrs. Richardson to worry more about her male students because they did not demonstrate the same level of organization and commitment. This concern pulled her attention towards the male students.

"GET MY ATTENTION IF YOU NEED ME": GENDERED DYNAMICS IN MRS. RICHARDSON'S CLASSROOM

As another classroom period started, students retrieved their laptops from the cart, picked out their folder from the crate next to the desktop computers, and gathered their materials at their desks. Mrs. Richardson stood nearby the doorway and asked who needed help. A few students were too preoccupied with their cell phones to pay attention

to Mrs. Richardson's offer. Although Mrs. Richardson posed the question to the entire class, there were two male students in particular, Jack Perez and Ricky Salazar (non-parenting students), with whom she made eye contact when she asked her question. She then proceeded to walk over to the young men to check on their progress. It had already been some time since I had started observing Mrs. Richardson's class, and by that point I noticed that Jack and Ricky, like most of the male students, were typically off-task during each class. Although they usually had a laptop in front of them to help them with their work, they often surfed the web and talked to one another quietly. It was not uncommon to hear them tell jokes, point out off-topic discoveries on each other's laptops, or stare off into space, especially when Mrs. Richardson separated them.

I wouldn't be surprised if she separated them again this time, but she didn't, at least not yet. Mrs. Richardson then walked over to another young man, James Ramirez (non-teen parent) who was also off-task, to explain two new assignments to him. I overheard Mrs. Richardson ask, "Can you think of anyone you can interview?" James responded, "My sister." After talking about the interview assignment in more depth, Mrs. Richardson offered a modification to another assignment regarding the topic of bulling. She explained to James that he had the option of creating a PowerPoint presentation about the topic instead of creating a film. As they negotiated what was more doable for him within a certain time frame, James eventually decided to pursue the PowerPoint idea Mrs. Richardson offered him. Mrs. Richardson then briefly turned her gaze to the other side of the room and asked two young women if they "were good," followed by her usual reminder, "Get my attention if you need me." I noticed that Mrs. Richardson went into

great detail about an assignment with James, she only quickly checked in with two female students who were focused and working diligently in their area.

One of the two young women Mrs. Richardson addressed was Kira Ramos, a mothering student who was busily typing away on her own personal laptop as she focused on her computer screen. Her expression conveyed that she was on a mission to finish something major. She was sitting in her usual place—a desk that migrated away from the oval of desks to claim its own spot up against the wall near the doorway and eroded the oval I encountered on my first day of observations. Back then, I would first enter Mrs. Richardson's room by walking behind Kira's desk to get to the other side where I usually sat to take notes. However, over time Kira moved the desk back father and father until it eventually ended up against the wall. As a result, a new routine emerged in which I began walking in front of her desk to make my away across the room from the entrance. In a interview with Kira, she explained that she liked to sit with her back up against the wall because she liked to know what was happening in the room at all times. She further explained that she did not like to have people behind her because it was distracting. For Kira, the arrangement of the classroom coupled with her desk up against the wall enabled her to have a sense of control in the environment, and this provided her with enough comfort to focus on her work. In fact, Kira and the word "focus" became inseparable in my notes. Out of all the students in Mrs. Richardson's 7th period class, Kira was the most focused, self-disciplined, and determined student. She eventually got recognized as student of the month, which was an honor that Kira proudly wore. Through Kira's example, another female student, Cristella Dominguez (non-

mothering student) was compelled to move her desk back alongside Kira's desk. The two were working intently on their laptops, so Mrs. Richardson let them ride their wave of productivity by simply reminding them to "grab" her if they needed assistance.

Kira's repositioning of her desk, followed by Cristella, changed the formation of the desks from an oval shape to two separate rows running parallel to one another with students facing each other. Kira and Cristella's desk were separated and up against the wall on one end of the two rows, and the desktop computers were up against the wall on the other end the room. Somehow the students at the other end of the oval eventually shifted their desks to straighten out the original curved formation. Kira's move impacted the formation of the desks, but Mrs. Richardson didn't seem to mind and instead allowed Kira to create her own space away from the rest of the group. In an interview with Mrs. Richardson, she explained that it is important to provide individual accommodations to students if they need them. In other words, this move resonated with Mrs. Richardson's efforts to create individual opportunities for each student.

As I looked away from Kira's direction, I noticed Mrs. Richardson was standing again behind some student desks as she scanned the room to look at each individual student and redirected those who weren't working. She honed in on another male student named Michael Garcia (non-parenting student) and asked as she giggled, "Michael, you are trying to avoid looking at me!" He nodded sheepishly as he pulled his laptop closer. Mrs. Richardson turned to another female student, Charlize Gomez (non-parenting student) to ask whether she was close to being done with her PowerPoint. When the student confirmed that she was almost done, Mrs. Richardson turned and walked toward

her cabinets in the corner of the classroom and took out a container full of candy, including chocolates, and she began distributing candy to the students. Passing out candies was a routine she often used to help students with their energy level because she noticed that the students in her afternoon classes had a tendency to slow down. She even told one particular young man in her 8th period class that he should move to one of her morning class periods because his energy and attention was depleted by the time he showed up to her class in the afternoon. The daily candy ritual reflected two realities: it not only takes high energy to be productive in Mrs. Richardson's class, it also takes enormous concentration and self-discipline because everything is self-paced. The quiet and subdued environment along with the humming background noise from a fan could often lull many to sleep. The bucket of candies made its way around room and each student grabbed their own piece ready to tear off that wrapper and gobble it up, except for Kira who calmly nibbled on her bite sized Snickers as she scrolled through her screen. I could tell the students needed something to re-energize, yet Kira seemed unfazed.

Caroline, a non-mothering student, got up to throw away her wrapper eyeing a specific poster in the room. She suddenly broke the quietness in the room when she exclaimed, "M'am, you know, I like you because you like Jimi Hendrix! I saw that poster the first day I walked in!" Mrs. Richardson giggled to affirm the students' comment as she looked over at the poster of Jimi Hendrix. Mrs. Richardson's attention then moved to Jack and Ricky again and asked them if they were done with Julius Caesar yet. After she spent some time with them, she then turned to another student who seemed off-task and she asked him whether she needed to tell him the story of Beowulf. At this point, she

was on her rolling chair again and she spent some time talking with the young man about Beowulf for his assignment since it seemed he had trouble focusing on reading. Her attention then moved to Michael and asked him if he was awake or stuck, she continued, "Friday is a good day to finish a project, you got it started, why not finish it!" Her attention then turned back to Jack and Ricky to see whether they had made any progress. In the meantime, I turned back to Kira and Cristella, and I noticed that they were both still working diligently. Cristella asked a specific question about the font for the PowerPoint that she was working on, and Mrs. Richardson looked up to respond to Cristella's question from across the room. After this exchange, I scrolled through my notes on my laptop to notice that most of Mrs. Richardson's interactions with the young women in the room were short and to the point, whereas her interactions with the boys seemed much more long-winded as she redirected them, tried to engage their interest by contextualizing the assignments, and asked whether they had enough sleep. I also noticed that the young women in the room seemed the most engaged in their work throughout the period compared to the young men in the room. The check-ins with the female students revolved around how close they were to finishing their assignments, whereas with several of the young men, Mrs. Richardson asked whether they had even worked on their assignments at all.

I also noticed that most of the young women specifically inquired about how many more modules they needed to complete to receive their credit, and they even discussed a timeline for finishing the work, especially Kira. Towards the end of class, Kira turned to Cristella to share that she only needed one more slide to go to complete her

PowerPoint presentation. Mrs. Richardson momentarily stopped explaining Kate Chopin's story to one of the male students and lifted her head towards Kira and Cristella and asked, "How are we doing over there?" Mrs. Richardson's question was met with fierce typing from both girls, so she turned back to the student she was working with knowing full well that the young women across the room were focused and on a roll. By the time, Mrs. Richardson finished explaining Kate Chopin, and the gender dynamics during her time, to one of the young men, Kira was done with her assignment. After e-mailing her power point presentation to Mrs. Richardson, Kira walked over to the teacher desk as she waited patiently for Mrs. Richardson to walk back from her rolling chair. "Let me get your grade Kira," said Mrs. Richardson as she walked back to her desk, "You're probably going to be done with English by Christmas." Kira confidently replied, "I think so." Once her grade was sorted out, Kira walked back to her desk and began having a conversation with Cristella who was wrapping up her own work in preparation for the bell. It struck me as odd that Kira began a conversation with a peer in class because, up to that point in time, I had only seen her focus on her own work right up to the bell. This time, however, I suppose she reached a stopping point less than five minutes before the bell rang, so she decided to talk to Cristella who seemed like-minded enough to get along with.

Kira asked Cristella: "What science are you taking?"

Cristella responded: "I'm taking Physics then Aquatic Science. I passed Chemistry, it's easy."

Kira: "Yeah, like IPC."

Cristella: “I had a good teacher.”

Kira: “I want to graduate this year. I want to get all A’s. I’m still taking World History then U.S. History.”

Both young women began collecting their bags when Mrs. Richardson notified the class that they needed to save their work before the bell rang. Kira and Cristella continued to talk about their classes at RGV School, the number of course credits they needed to graduate, and how many modules were required for the classes they were currently taking. Since Kira was farther ahead than Cristella, she began to offer advice to her regarding testing out of certain subjects. Cristella listened intently to Kira’s pointers and replied, “That’s cool!”

Kira then turned and walked back to Mrs. Richardson, as the rest of the students collected their things, to ask her about the remaining modules for her English credit. Kira turned around toward a calendar located behind her desk to calculate how long it would take her to finish the remaining modules. Mrs. Richardson smiled and giggled in response to Kira’s urgent attention to the calendar, “Don’t worry, you’ll be done way before your birthday!” Kira jotted something down in her notepad as she responded, “Yeah I know!” The bell rang and Mrs. Richardson wished everyone a great day as a new set of students walked in.

Mrs. Richardson’s Gendered allocation of time and attention

The above portrait shows how Mrs. Richardson was often preoccupied with: (1) motivating her male students, (2) redirecting their off-task behavior, (3) negotiating what to do with their assignments, (4) explaining the assignments at length, and (5) talking

about the relevance and importance of the projects or assignments they were working on in class. With the young women, on the other hand, her interactions were mostly brief, specific to the students' questions, and a source of confirmation of the young women's work ethic and plans for finishing the modules. Mrs. Richardson's trust for her the young women, and mothering students especially, combined with her general flexibility for her students, opened up the opportunity for Kira to create her own niche in the classroom away from the rest of the students. Yet another female student followed her example and also strayed away from the rest of the group. This not only shows a gendered allocation of time and attention from the teacher, but also a structural gendered divide that was made possible through Mrs. Richardson's flexible caring approach for her students. Even though Kira and her female peer changed the layout of the desks, Mrs. Richardson allowed for this change to occur in order to meet the individual needs of her students (namely Kira in this case). However, during my classroom observations of Mrs. Richardson's room, I often wondered how an individualized approach to care could also inadvertently reinforce gendered divisions and teacher-student interactions.

In both the 7th and 8th period classes that observed, Mrs. Richardson often spent time with male students in order to redirect their attention, help them focus on their individual work, and guide them towards finishing their modules. She also searched for ways to peak their interest by providing background context about the assignments and strike up conversations that would enable them to see the relevance and importance of a certain topic. Several times throughout out my notes, I jotted the amount of time she spent with each student, and as I revisited my notes each day for coding and analysis,

more than half of the classroom period was spent with male students. I noticed that the interactions she usually spent with her female students revolved around answering specific questions, updating them with their grades, and brief check-ins to see whether they needed any help. With the young men, however, she usually sat in her rolling chair for a longer period of time to ask how they were feeling, break down the content of the assignment, provide historical background, and ask them what they thought about the issue or topic.

As it was shown in Ms. Luna's class in Chapter 5, Mrs. Richardson's tendency to differentially allocate her time and attention to her students along gendered lines, however, is not a unique finding. Education scholars have long noted that young men tend to be called on more than girls in pk-12 classrooms, and teachers tend to be more concerned about boys' level of engagement in class linking their "rowdiness" and "hyperactivity" to boredom that teachers urgently feel compelled to address in the classroom (Bailey et al., 1992; Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2006; Davies, 2003; Garrahy, 2003; Sadker & Sadker, 1995). It has also been noted that teachers may articulate a strong belief system in gender equality, but their teaching practices indicate otherwise as they enact gendered streotyping and differenital treatment based on gender (Garrahy, 2003).

However, there were certain days in which Mrs. Richardson did spend more time with young women and she had more detailed conversations with them to help them along with their assignments. This usually happened if the young women were being loud and disengaged like the young men, or when several male students were absent. The

following portrait exhibits what it looks like with Mrs. Richardson engages with two young women, Kira (teen mother) and Marian (non-teen mother). Within the portrait, I also point out the ways in which Mrs. Richardson modified her assignments to not only suit the skills and interests of the individual students as discussed in a previous portrait, but to also make the assignment and projects culturally relevant. Mrs. Richardson was heavily cognizant of the cultural hybridity of the Rio Grande Valley along the U.S./Mexico border in which students were familiar with Mexican, Tex-Mex, and mainstream American cultural forms and ways of speaking. Throughout my observations I noticed that she liked to use regional language to connect with the students, and create assignments about Latino/Chicano activists and scholars like Cesar Chavez and Gloria Anzaldua.

The following portrait, however, focuses on Mrs. Richardson connection with one of her female students, Mariana, through a project about Gloria Anzaldúa who was a Tejana/Chicana scholar and activist who grew up in the U.S./Mexico border region in which RGV School is located. Although Mariana was not a teen parent like Kira and Esperanza, I showcase this portrait as an example of how Mrs. Richardson's pedagogical practices are not only culturally relevant, but also locally grounded. I also point out how Mrs. Richardson likes to learn alongside her students by assigning topics that she is curious about and open to further integrating into her curriculum if her students find the topics interesting. It is these set of pedagogical strategies that she also implements with the mothering students in her classes.

"YOU LEARN SOMETHING NEW EVERYDAY!": MAKING LOCAL CONNECTIONS

At the beginning of 7th period class I was casually chatting with Mrs. Richardson when she suddenly turned and realized that there were only three students who showed up to class, including Kira. Mrs. Richardson seemed to have read my mind when she asked, "Where's everyone today?" Mrs. Richardson began passing out progress reports to the students who looked up at her as they settled in their places. She continued her wonderment, "Good grief, where is everybody!" Upon finishing her sentence, another male student strolled in. Mrs. Richardson turned to the students and asked, "Carlos, are you sitting here?" Shortly after Carlos settled into his seat, another male student, Roger, strutted through the doorway holding a textbook by his side. Mrs. Richardson asked Roger how he was doing, to which he responded in a nonchalant tone, "Chilling." Before Carlos and Roger showed up, I thought the young women would outnumber the male students in the classroom for the first time, but by the time all students were settled into their desk and working, there were only two girls and 3 boys. Although there were more boys as usual, I wondered if the smaller number of students would impact the dynamics in the classroom. Already I noticed that Mrs. Richardson was becoming preoccupied with Roger's progress report, which she seemed to be missing, but after the problem was resolved, Mariana raised her hand and exclaimed, "M'am, can you help me!" Mrs. Richardson sat in her rolling chair and rolled over to Mariana and asked what Mariana was working on. Mariana responded, "What am I supposed to do with Gloria Anzaldúa?" Mrs. Richardson explained to Mariana that she needed to conduct research about who Gloria Anzaldúa was and explain her contributions. After collecting enough information,

she was to either write a short paper, or create a PowerPoint about her highlighting why she is important. Mariana began typing Anzaldúa's complete name and she began to click on different websites as Mrs. Richardson explained the assignment.

My heart skipped a beat when I heard Gloria Anzaldúa's name, and I looked at Mrs. Richardson with shock that she had given an assignment with Anzaldúa as the topic. My surprise stemmed from my own educational experiences as a student who attended schools in a nearby town in the same region. Gloria Anzaldúa is actually from the Rio Grande Valley, which is where I grew up, but I didn't learn about her until I attended college in central Texas. When I first read Anzaldúa's canonical book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* I remember going through feelings of anger and resentment that I had not read the book, nor any of her work during my time as a student along the U.S./Mexico border. I had never imagined that a Tejana/Chicana woman from the Rio Grande Valley—someone like me—could write about experiences that were so much like my own. I wondered why none of my teachers introduced me to her writing and theories while I was in middle school or high school. Did my teachers not know about her? If they knew about her, were they not allowed to teach about her work? Was the high-stakes testing regime too stringent to allow them to introduce Anzaldúa's work into the curriculum? I was pleasantly excited and surprised that Mrs. Richardson somehow knew about Gloria Anzaldúa, but then I suddenly remembered that there were several other assignments in which Mrs. Richardson had the students complete assignments about Cesar Chavez and the National Farm Workers Association, as well as other pertinent civil rights movement figures and events. Mrs. Richardson especially made these sorts of

modifications for the speech and theatre modules in order to engage students; so assigning Gloria Anzaldúa made sense in light of my observations. It put a smile on my face to know that Mariana would learn about Gloria Anzaldúa much sooner than I did.

While Mariana conducted her research, Mrs. Richardson rolled over to Kira after she asked a question about her assignment. Mrs. Richardson began an extensive and in-depth conversation about the Women's Rights Movement with Kira. Mrs. Richardson asked Kira to imagine herself in that time period and she talked about particular events during the movement in which women "were fighting for their rights" because "they were very constricted." During their conversation, Kira pointed to the screen on her laptop to direct Mrs. Richardson's attention to different pictures and stories she found on different websites regarding the women's movement. This conversation revolving around curriculum was one of the longest I had seen between Kira and Mrs. Richardson. Rather than providing historical context and details to some of the young men that were usually caught off task, this time Mrs. Richardson was providing conversational and academically driven assistance to the only two female students in the room, Kira and Mariana. I also noticed that both of them were working on assignments about women.

Midway through the class, Mariana printed out a document in which she compiled information about Gloria Anzaldúa. She walked over to Mrs. Richardson's desk to show her what she had found. Mrs. Richardson took the paper and began reading the content. She suddenly stopped reading as curious expression spread across her face. She then took on an inquisitive tone to quiz Mariana on a key point she had noticed while reading the document:

Mrs. Richardson: “Wait, where is Hargill, Texas?”

Mariana replied, “I don’t know.”

Mrs. Richardson: “It’s in Hidalgo County!”

Mariana: “Where is that?”

Mrs. Richardson: (chuckling and in a loud tone so that others can hear) “That’s next door to us! Like 50 miles or less! It’s part of the McAllen area!”

Mariana: (looking up the town on her phone) “It’s actually 40 minutes from here!”

Mrs. Richardson: “I didn’t know [she was from] was here!”

Mariana: (in amazement) “I didn’t know either!”

Mrs. Richardson: (chuckling) “Oh good! That makes me feel better. You learn something new everyday!”

Several of the students looked up during Mariana and Mrs. Richardson’s conversation. I noticed that Mrs. Richardson raised her voice as if she wanted the rest of the class to hear their discovery. Both Mariana and Mrs. Richardson were both excited to discover that Anzaldúa was originally from a town nearby, and Mrs. Richardson wanted the rest of the students to also know about their discovery. I enjoyed witnessing that they had learned something new together and I smiled as Mariana began to share more about what she had learned about Anzaldúa. Mariana talked about Anzaldúa’s educational trajectory, including UT Austin, and that she eventually moved to California. Mrs. Richardson listened to Mariana’s synopsis of what she had learned and she wrote down some notes on a notepad while Mariana spoke. Mrs. Richardson returned the document to

Mariana after her impromptu presentation of her latest findings, and then walked back at her desk to continue working. Mrs. Richardson certainly seemed interested in what Mariana had to say; especially because Mrs. Richardson habitually expressed to her students that she liked to "learn something new everyday."

I noticed that Mrs. Richardson liked to assign new topics to her students as a way to learn more about them. It was almost as if her students were like her research assistants. Any topic or name that she would come across that seemed relevant to her students in some way would be an opportunity for her to change up the modules and assign something she was curious to learn about herself. She merged her culturally relevant strategies with own curiosity to expand her knowledge about topics and her students can connect with and become engaged.

I approached Mrs. Richardson and I asked her about her interactions with Mariana and how the assignment about Gloria Anzaldúa came about. Mrs. Richardson explained that she came across Anzaldúa's name when she was looking up literary and historical figures that would resonate for her students. She decided to assign her to Mariana to learn more about Anzaldúa and decide whether she should look into her further, while at the same time hoping that Mariana would find her interesting. Mrs. Richardson shared that she was delighted to learn that Anzaldúa is from the region. Upon hearing her that she was pleasantly surprised, I quickly became excited again to let her know that Gloria Anzaldúa wrote an amazing book that changed my life. She asked me what it was about, and I gave a general idea of major themes and that it would certainly be relevant to many of her students. After I gave her the complete title of *Borderlands*, her eyes lit up as she

made a mental note of the title and immediately said she was going to look it up and order the book to check it out. Towards the end of our conversation I also noted that Mariana seemed excited about her project about Anzaldúa because she asked Mrs. Richardson if she could take her work home to continue working on it. Mrs. Richardson smiled and agreed that she noticed the same.

After our conversation, I wondered if she would find the *Borderlands* inappropriate or "too risky," especially because it dealt with complicated themes that several school districts have frowned upon in the past and currently. The book had been banned in several places, like Arizona's banning of the book as part of the state's resistance to Mexican-American/Chicano Studies. I wondered if Mrs. Richardson would even bring up the book again after she skimmed it. Much to my delight, towards the end of my fieldwork, she approached me with great gratitude and expressed how much she loved the book! She shared with me that she was incredibly excited to implement the book in her class, especially with "her girls!" I thanked her for the exciting news and I left the conversation eager to follow up on how it would work out for her and her students.

INDIVIDUALIZED CARE AND SUPPORT MERITS INDIVIDUALIZED STUDENTS PERSPECTIVES

As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Mrs. Richardson's class is much like an international airport hub in which students fly in to complete a different credit on their own timeline. However, the general mission is the same, each student must arrive at their final destination, graduation. As the air traffic controller, Mrs. Richardson's main

goal is to guide her students towards completing their required credits in her classes and direct them towards graduation. During one of my routine classroom observations, I witnessed Mrs. Richardson become flustered as her patience began to run out for one of her male students who was usually off-task and behind with his own specific schedule. In an exasperated tone she exclaimed, "Chihuahuas! When are you going to finish that! You're killing me! You're killing me! My goal is to help you graduate, so you need to work as quickly as possible!" She emphasized her urgency with drama and she used a familiar expression in the region, "Chihuahuas", in order to push her student to complete his work. If the students did not exude urgency through careful planning, staying on schedule, and showing progress, then she took on the role of Jiminy Cricket and became their conscience in order to push them along their self-paced individual work.

The mothering students usually didn't need Jiminy Cricket directly by their side to push them to do their work, per se. However, they did appreciate her presence and support in providing particular forms of assistance. In the following sections, I pull out particular ways in which the young women found Mrs. Richardson helpful and supportive based on the interviews.

"She teaches what you need to know": Kira's self-driven approach matches Mrs. Richardson's individualized style.

As previously discussed, Kira meshed well with Mrs. Richardson's classroom structure and the kind of support Mrs. Richardson provided to the students. Kira shared: "[Mrs. Richardson] is a good teacher, she's real nice and talkative, and if you tell her like you need help on this… she'll break it down. She teaches what you need to know…" For

Kira, it was important to her that Mrs. Richardson was present to provide assistance and help to her whenever she asked for it. Kira also liked that the class was quiet: "I like it quiet, so as long as it's quiet, I can do anything. That's what I like about her class, she makes it quiet." Kira also pointed out that she liked that everyone in the classroom worked on different modules, so she did not have to go at the same pace as other students. It was important for her to be able to move ahead of others and manage her own time at an individual level. It was urgent for her to finish her modules as quickly as possible so that she could graduate on time. Her goal was to graduate at the end of the spring semester in May, so she structured her time and schedule accordingly.

What was helpful about Mrs. Richardson's class for Kira was the ability for her to be *in control* of her surroundings and pacing, and to have consistent accessibility to Mrs. Richardson's guidance and instruction. In regards to controlling her surroundings, in a previous portrait I emphasized that Kira separated her desk away from the rest of the group in order to have her back against the wall and have a clear view of the room and everyone in it. She expressed that she needed to know what was happening in the room at all times so that she could concentrate on her work and not worry about what others were doing. Mrs. Richardson respected Kira's preference and allowed her to change the layout of the desks.

During my interview with Kira, she also made it clear that she was focused on her own work and she did not like to worry about others, so socializing was not a priority for her. Mrs. Richardson's quiet environment complimented her plan to keep away from socializing, and her individualized pedagogical style also matched with Kira's control of

when to ask for assistance. In fact, when I asked Kira to describe what a caring and supportive teacher looks like, she described someone much like Mrs. Richardson: "[A caring teacher] pays attention to you all the time, or like you're just there. And they start walking around to every student asking, 'Do you need help?'" Kira emphasized that the presence of the teacher provides assurance and a sense of security for her, especially when they consistently check in with her to make sure she is on the right track. For instance, Kira shared, "[Mrs. Richardson] always asks me if I need help, even when I didn't ask for it." Kira's determination and self-driven style meshes well with Mrs. Richardson's individualized attention and general set-up of her classroom.

In the interview, Kira also expressed her love for reading and writing. She explained that she often goes to the school library to check out books, and she also used to visit the public library to check out John Grisham novels. However, she also lamented that she did not have much time to read for her own pleasure since she is focusing on finishing school. I point out that Kira enjoyed reading and writing because it shows that she not only enjoyed Mrs. Richardson's classroom for it structure, but she also liked it because the language arts and humanities are subject areas that she is drawn to academically.

"In her class, I felt comfortable.": Janet connected with Mrs. Richardson.

During my time observing Mrs. Richardson's classes, Janet had already completed her credits with Mrs. Richardson; however, during the interview she had much to share about what she appreciated from the classes and the teachers' approach. Like Kira, Janet also like Mrs. Richardson's individualized pedagogical style. What she

particularly enjoyed was Mrs. Richardson's ability to personalize projected and assignments according to students' interests and skills. In an interview, Janet explained that she like that Mrs. Richardson was "ok with students doing projects differently." She especially liked working on creative projects like making comic strips on the iPads in which she had the freedom to create different characters. It's important to point out that the school did not supply the iPads for the students; Mrs. Richardson was able to purchase iPads for the students through a grant she applied for and received. During an informal conversation with Mrs. Richardson, she explained that technology is very crucial in regards to her teaching because she thinks that tools, such as iPads and laptops, offer great opportunities to provide individualized instruction and options for students to complete assignments. However, I noticed that although she likes to present options to students, she did push students to use all the equipment in class at least once so that they get some exposure to various applications, software programs, and websites for creating movie trailers, making PowerPoint presentations, creating surveys, conducting research, and constructing comic strips. Mrs. Richardson liked to keep up to date with the latest creative applications and websites the students may enjoy using for her class. And indeed, it seemed that Janet greatly appreciated Mrs. Richardson's incorporation of the iPads into the modules.

Janet also pointed out how Mrs. Richardson's class was not only a hub for completing several course credits, but it was also a place in which she could learn about and access different resources. Janet shared: "She was very nice to me…if I ever needed resources like for the work in class or a book [for casual reading] she would lend them to

me." Janet expressed that reading is her "favorite subject" so she took advantage of Mrs. Richardson' literary knowledge to access good books for her own personal enjoyment. Not only did she have access to books for casual reading, but she also gained helpful insights for books about pregnancy and child development. At the time of my study, Janet was pregnant, so she approached Mrs. Richardson to ask her questions about her pregnancy. In response, Mrs. Richardson recommended several books that can help her learn more about her body, common pregnancy experiences and occurrences for women, and how children develop in the womb. Janet explained that the books were helpful and that she appreciated Mrs. Richardson's openness in providing advice and reading materials to expand her knowledge. During my interview with Janet, it showed that she "felt comfortable" in the classroom, and she felt at ease approaching Mrs. Richardson. Like Kira, Janet was a quiet and reserved student who kept to her self, so Mrs. Richardson's equally quiet style meshed well with Janet. She felt at ease in a quiet environment in which she felt like she had access to the teacher's guidance, expertise, resources, and knowledge. She explained that even if Mrs. Richardson would be at her desk grading, she still felt that she could walk up to her at anytime to ask her for help.

Janet also shared it was customary for Mrs. Richardson to approach her to ask her how she was feeling and whether her pregnancy was going well. During these regular check-ins, Janet shared that Mrs. Richardson disclosed her own experiences as a mother. For Janet, it mattered that she and the teacher are able to relate to one another in order to forge a connection through mutual understanding, especially in regards to challenges of being a mother. Janet explained that Mrs. Richardson often empathized with her new role

as mother, and in order to encourage and motivate Janet, Mrs. Richardson often told her stories about her own children to show that she is not alone and that responsibilities as a mother decreases over time. Janet emphasized that Mrs. Richardson did not necessarily tell her that it gets easier as a mother, but rather her role as mother would change over time. Janet greatly enjoyed Mrs. Richardson's personal stories and disclosure of her own personal life as a mother because she was able to connect with her teacher in a way that encouraged her to take on her new role as a teen mother with positive outlook.

"She's more of the quiet type…": Sandra looks for collective conversations and joking.

Like Kira, Sandra also likes that Mrs. Richardson's class is based on modules and it is self-paced. Also, much like Janet, she pointed out that she appreciates that range of options that Mrs. Richardson offers for to complete the assignments in the modules. Unlike Kira and Janet, however, Sandra does not enjoy literature, especially "the old, old English stories" like "Antigone and Sophocles." However, she emphasized that she is creative and enjoys making things, so she expressed relief when she told me about the opportunity to put together a movie trailer about Antigone. It made the assignment much more digestible and enjoyable for her, and it motivated her to get excited about the process of putting together a movie trailer in the way she deemed most fit according to her artistic taste.

Along with Sandra's artistic flare as form of expression, Sandra is also outspoken and social, so when I asked her whether she found Mrs. Richardson supportive and

caring, she was quick to point out Mrs. Richardson's more quiet disposition. She also compared Mrs. Richardson to Mrs. Santos:

> "She's really nice and sometimes I joke around with her. [Mrs. Santos] is more jokative [sic] and more outgoing, and more like funny. And [Mrs. Richardson], she's more of the quiet type. She still jokes around sometimes."

For Sandra, it was important to be able to talk openly with a teacher and connect through informal conversations and joking during class. Sandra's comparison of Mrs. Santos and Mrs. Richardson emphasizes how the structural and pedagogical style of each teacher enabled informal joking and open conversations to happen organically and frequently with one teacher due to her whole group instructional style, but less frequently with the other teacher because of the more private and individual style of the class. In fact, when I asked Sandra what she thought Mrs. Richardson could do to be more supportive and caring, Sandra responded that she would like to see Mrs. Richardson "sit with everyone and talk to everyone more." When Sandra shared this response in the interview, I pointed out that she frequently sits in her rolling chair to check in on everyone to which she nodded and expressed that she should do that more often. What I understood from Snadra is that rather than Mrs. Richardson rolling to each student, she would like to see more interactions from the teacher with the whole group. Unlike Kira and Janet, who enjoyed one on one attention from Mrs. Richardson, it seemed Sandra wanted more open dialogue in which others could chime in and have a more collective conversation, much like Mrs. Santos class, which Sandra used as a point of reference.

"I think it's confusing for me": Esperanza feeling discombobulated

Esperanza worked on her Speech credit with Mrs. Richardson and she explained to me that she strongly disliked speech, so it was tough for her to focus on her modules. When I asked her whether she felt Mrs. Richardson was supportive she responded:

> "I really didn't talk to her, but I would talk to her when I didn't understand stuff. I guess I was shy because she wasn't one of my teachers."

Esperanza's response about Mrs. Richardson not being one of her teachers surprised me at first, but as she further explained I understood that the self-paced format of the class in which each student works on a different module made it seem like she was more of a resource teacher than a traditional classroom teacher like the rest of her teachers at RGV school. Although there were other module-based classes at RGV School, the only self-paced class that she was taking at the time of my study was Mrs. Richardson's class. The layout of the class and Mrs. Richardson's individualized pedagogical style was different from the rest of Esperanza's classes at the time, so it was confusing for her to make sense of how the class worked and how she was supposed to seek help from Mrs. Richardson.

In Mrs. Richardson's self-paced classroom with individual modules, Esperanza seemed a bit discombobulated, as if waiting for some guidance and direct instruction of what's to come. I often noticed that at the beginning of class she briefly looked around and glanced at what her peers were up to, then turned to her personal tablet too as a way to center herself and gain some grounding. She often turned to her boyfriend as well, to ask him questions about the assignments or simply chat. In fact, Esperanza liked to keep up with some of her peers around her in each of her classes, and Mrs. Richardson's class

was no exception. Although Esperanza was not as openly vocal as some of her peers in her classes, this did not necessarily indicate that she was quiet. Instead, she was quite social and she seemed to enjoy side conversations and chatter with her peers as she completed individual work. In Mrs. Santos' and Ms. Luna's class, side chatter happened naturally since all the students worked on the same assignment and the teacher pushed students to keep up with one another in order to finish the work on time. Side conversations, banter, giggling, and movement throughout the room to share materials was common in Mrs. Santos' and Ms. Luna's classroom. Their rooms were often flooded with a plethora of voices, or at least the overarching authoritative tone from the teachers, especially Mrs. Santos' theatric persona. However, in Mrs. Richardson's classroom, the classroom ambience was quiet, subdued, and highly individualized, reminiscent of a study hall. Each student was in charge of keeping track of their own work at their own pace, and everyone was doing something different, so side conversations and chatter did not happen organically like the other two classes I observed. Instead, side conversations went against the quiet atmosphere and stood out like a sore thumb. Therefore, it was easy to listen into students' conversations and even if they whispered it was easy to pick up on key phrases to piece together what the conversation was about.

For Esperanza, this impeded her from feeling as part of a collective whole, which seemed to disorient her place in the classroom. She often turned to her boyfriend, as well as some other male peers, to carve out a niche for herself in Mrs. Richardson's classroom. Instead of separating herself from the group like Kira often did in Mrs. Richardson's 7th period class, Esperanza liked to be at the center of the classroom in the midst of familiar

peers in order to feel a sense of belonging in a classroom that seemed fractured and disjointed for her. In an interview with Esperanza, when I asked her whether she thought Mrs. Richardson was supportive, she responded:

> "She was busy because she had a lot of students…and they are all doing different things…she tries her best, but I think sometimes it's hard to be with a lot of students, and doing different stuff…it's confusing for her. I feel it's confusing because I think it's confusing for me…"

The format of the classroom and Mrs. Richardson's role in the classroom was confusing and overwhelming for Esperanza. In light of her general view of Mrs. Richardson's classroom, I realized that Esperanza's overwhelmed feeling became the lens through which she interpreted Mrs. Richardson's view of the class. As a result, Esperanza was hesitant to ask Mrs. Richardson for help.

Although Esperanza felt overwhelmed with the multiple modules that students were working on, in the interview, she pointed out that she liked how the class was made up of students of different ages and from different grade levels. She explained that she especially liked having older students in the class because they have gone through more experiences than the younger students, and as a younger student she had much to learn from her older peers. She emphasized that she likes to hear about other people's stories about their difficult experiences with drugs and other hardships and obstacles in order to learn valuable lessons. Esperanza explained:

"[If older students] experienced something bad that they didn't like, then us [young people]…like you shouldn't do this, cuz this harms you, or this is bad for you, and this is good for you."

It was clear that Esperanza greatly valued her peers' advice, stories, and experiences, and she also liked it when teachers would also emphasize important life lessons, which often occurred in Mrs. Santos' teen parenting class. Like Sandra, Esperanza would also seek collective conversations in class, but she looked for these opportunities not only for joking and socializing like Sandra, but also for collective learning experiences and personal growth. Esperanza liked classroom environments and teaching strategies that prompted collective learning and peers sharing stories. For instance, story telling among peers was common in Ms. Luna's class because students usually worked on the same assignments during class, which enabled the students to have side conversations as they worked on the same task. However, in Mrs. Richardson's class in which everyone is working on a different task, side conversations and story telling is harder to come by as Mrs. Richardson stressed a quiet working environment in which she rolled from one student to the next providing individual instruction.

Why are the mothering students' perspectives important?

What all these student perspectives demonstrate about Mrs. Richardson's individualized teaching approach and pedagogical strategies is that it works well for students who like to have autonomy, are focused, and have a more quiet and calm demeanor like Mrs. Richardson. However, this it not to say that it takes similar personalities and demeanors for teachers and students to connect. Instead it is helpful to

think about Bourdieu's theories about the logics of practice to understand how the structure of the classroom, in which students work on self-paced individual modules, influences the pedagogical practices and interactions Mrs. Richardson carried out with her students. This structure may be conducive to some students, while other students like Esperanza, may have trouble functioning in such a space. This structural mismatch made it hard for Esperanza to connect with Mrs. Richardson in an authentic way (Valenzuela, 1999). This also impeded Esperanza from feeling more comfortable with approaching Mrs. Richardson for help and assistance on her assignments.

While students like Kira need privacy to focus on their work and look to work in isolation, other students may be like Esperanza, desiring collective learning opportunities in which they can forge a sense of belonging and find meaning as group. Mrs. Richardson's individualized instructional style along with the module-based structure of the class may immediately mesh well with students like Kira while clashing with student like Esperanza, but what these student perspectives also reveal is that Mrs. Richardson can address vastly different students' needs and personalities by finding ways to connect with students in a way that is not only relevant curricular-wise, but also at a personal level.

In an interview with Mrs. Richardson, other than her graduate research project, she explained that she is a very private person and she likes to respect the privacy of her students, so she rarely asks them personal questions that would compel them to disclose their personal lives. She also rarely talks about her own personal life with students. For instance, Mrs. Richardson was also teen mother; she had her first child at the age of 18,

but she has not disclosed this to any of her students, even her mothering students. During the interview, I encouraged her to think about sharing her own stories about teen motherhood with her students. Janet's interview boiled in the back of my mind as I heard Mrs. Richardson's reluctance to share too much about herself to her students because she wanted to make sure that she focused on their academic needs. Although Mrs. Richardson did not disclose that she was a teen mother to Janet, she disclosed that she is a mother nonetheless, and this made a difference for Janet with forging a connection with her teacher. Janet liked having something in common with Mrs. Richardson the mutual understanding as mothers helped Janet feel that she was not alone and that she can be a mother and a student. I wondered what further disclosure would look like with students like Esperanza who greatly values advice, empathy, and camaraderie with teachers and peers who have gone through or are going through similar trials and tribulations. Even though Esperanza may not like Speech, modules, and individualized instruction, forging personally relevant connections with Mrs. Richardson may provide possibilities for Esperanza to forge a sense of belonging in the classroom through which the teacher can become a central contributor.

GENUINE CONCERN AND CARE FOR MOTHERING STUDENTS

Although Mrs. Richardson allocated her time and attention differentially in her classes according to gender, she nonetheless had a deep in internal commitment to provide care and support to her Latina students, especially those who were mothers. Hence, a contradiction emerged in which she vocally expressed concern and efforts to provide support for her female students, yet her pedagogical interactions in the classroom

conveyed a preoccupation with the young men who were behind in their modules. However, at this point I want to focus what her particular concerns for teen mothers were, and how these concerns factored into her interpretive lens about her students. I also point out how her concerns for her mothering students are similar to the concerns that Ms. Luna and Mrs. Santos expressed, signifying how the school culture and structure enables teachers to be in tune with their students' personal matters.

Like Ms. Luna and Mrs. Santos, Mrs. Richardson noticed that the young women go through great transformations, but according to her observations, their boyfriends have trouble adjusting to change and may consequently distract the progress of the young women. Mrs. Richardson understood that there are particular gender dynamics at work in the lives of the young women she interacts with on a daily basis. During an informal conversation she shared that she is doing her own graduate research regarding the lives of "Latina girls and violence." She confided in me that she has not found much literature about the topic, so she was afraid that she was not looking correctly. I reassured her that there is very little research on the topic, particularly in education, so she expressed relief upon hearing my experience with the topic in regards to research. I also mentioned that there is emerging research in the field of education that Latina women outnumber their male counterparts in college. I wanted to present positive findings regarding Latina youth to help create a more informed picture of what their educational trajectory as a population looks like currently. It caught me off guard, however, when Mrs. Richardson quickly reacted with a slight jump and exclaimed that even then, in the long run, "they tend to be controlled!"

After sharing this precarious viewpoint, which seemed to victimize Latina women and vilify Latino men, she then proceeded to share with me that one day the husband of one her mothering students came to RGV School to publicly reprimand the young woman for not doing well in school. I asked Mrs. Robinson, if the husband is a student at RGV School, and she quickly responded "no!" She also pointed out that there isn't a significant age difference between them, yet he acted more like a parent than a husband. Mrs. Richardson then drifted off into a daze as she muttered that this is the kind of thing she noticed about her female students, especially those who are teen mothers. She then explained, "After talking to the girls, they need to be heard, I want their voices to come forward." For Mrs. Richardson, it especially struck her that her students have stories to tell and they also exhibited resilience through their stories. Mrs. Richardson put her hand on her chest when she said that one of her students refused to continue being abused and controlled. She seemed to echo the pride and resilience of the young woman she had spoken to when she repeated what she had stated, "Not me!" I gave her more information about portraiture to help her along with her work, and I thanked her for sharing her generous insights.

After my conversation with Mrs. Richardson, I noted that the topic of violence in the lives of the mothering students came up again. Mrs. Santos' brought it up within the context teen dating violence and Mrs. Richardson also brought it up with the context of how the young women tend to be "controlled" not only in their heterosexual relationships, but within their families too. I also thought of Ms. Luna's discomfort upon learning more and more about the complexities in the personal lives of her students, and

she lamented that she was not trained in how to understand these complicated situations, let alone provide the kind of support and advice she felt would best serve her students. For Mrs. Richardson, she felt it was her responsibility to learn more about violence in the lives of students, especially Latino youth in education research, but to her dismay, there was not much she could find to help her understand how to process what she learns about her students and address their needs. Mrs. Santos' also expressed she was not prepared to teach students about teen dating violence, but like Mrs. Richardson, she decided to be proactive and conduct research online to find resources to teach about the topic and open up discussions in her class.

The teachers' grappling with violence and other complexities in the lives of their students, particularly mothering students, and their quest to find information and resources to help them along with addressing their students' needs, was a research surprise that came up several times during my fieldwork. Their concern about feeling underprepared made a lasting impression one me as I thought about what the implications of their reflections and struggle to overcome their perceived deficiency. I wondered how many other teachers feel the way they did, or whether there was something about the family-like structure and culture of RGV School that fostered a reflexive practice among the teachers. It struck me that the teachers did not resort to blaming their students for their "downfall," especially the teen mothers whom they saw as working hard to overcome their obstacles. Instead, they tried to make sense of the situations and context in which the students were immersed. The only blaming I picked up from Mrs.

Richardson, however, was that she pinned responsibility on the teen fathers for getting into trouble and distracting the young mothers.

Upon hearing about Mrs. Richardson's concern about her mothering students' personal lives, including issues of violence, I noticed how her observations of her students and knowledge about their personal lives closely matched Ms. Luna's and Mrs. Santos' observations and knowledge about their students. All three teacher discourses and concerns about addressing the needs of mothering students by being mindful of their personal lives and complexities outside of school signified a collective practice among the teachers at RGV School. The following statement from Mrs. Richardson during an interview demonstrates this collective sentiment:

> I think [teen parents] feel at home. That's my goal, to make them feel at home…*We* have had occasionally teachers who…make [teen parents] feel like [they have] done something wrong. And those teachers don't last long here. *We've* even had one teacher that was openly critical, and he was gone very shortly, because *we* don't do that. And if you don't think it's right, then you need to be somewhere else. Cuz this…may not agree with your personal values, but this is reality. It's very much reality for those girls, and *we've* got to give them everything that *we* possibly can to help them make a success of their life.

Throughout Mrs. Richardson's statement I italicized "we" to emphasize a collective mindset among the three teachers whose classrooms I focused on for this study.

CONCLUSION AND KEY FINDINGS

Much like Ms. Luna's classroom, gendered dynamics played out in a regular basis in Mrs. Richardson's classroom. Unlike, Ms. Luna, however, Mrs. Richardson was hyper-aware of gendered power dynamics in the personal lives of the mothering students in her classes, however, she did not seem aware of her own gendered practices in which she differentially allocated time and attention to her students according to gender. Boys received more individualized instruction from Mrs. Richardson, while the young women received brief check-ins. For Mrs. Richardson, however, she did not directly engage with a gendered interpretive lens like Ms. Luna in regards to making sense of her students' behavior. Instead it seemed like her attention was pulled towards whoever seemed distracted or disengaged, which often occurred with the young men in the class. However, there was one time in which Mrs. Richardson gravitated more towards a group of loud and disengaged young women during a movie they were watching for their modules. I noticed that Mrs. Richardson redirected them several times, paused the movie and explained it in ways to peak the students' interest. She also asked them several engaging questions, and connected the movie to their personal interests. I noticed that she reacted to the young women similarly to how she reacts to young men who are disengaged. Hence, her differential allocation of time among the students depended on who was exhibiting behaviors of disengagement, which often fell along gendered lines. Thinking about gender as an organizing principle in Mrs. Richardson's class shows how masculinity was constructed as disengagement in this space, whereas femininity was constructed as engaged and focused (Connell, 1987, 2005). The young women often kept

to themselves and worked diligently to finish their modules, so Mrs. Richardson would worry less about them since it seemed like they were taking care of themselves. A few male students also sometimes exhibited this same behavior, and they too would get minimal attention from Mrs. Richardson. Hence, femininity and masculinity was constructed in particular ways with a certain set of characteristics (engagement vs. disengagement) that both male and female students would enact and thus obtain differential attention from the teacher (Connell, 1987, 2005).

It is also important to highlight the classroom structure heavily influenced Mrs. Richardson's approach to her students. Contrary to Ms. Luna's fast-paced curriculum and "no-nonsense" classroom structure, Mrs. Richardson's class was self-paced and based on individualized care and support. This enabled certain students to connect with Mrs. Richardson in authentic ways (Noddings, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999), while a student like Esperanza (who needs whole group instruction and collective activities) was not readily able to connect with Mrs. Richardson, even though she interpreted the teacher as supportive. In order to forge connections with students like Esperanza, who need collectivity and casual conversation with her peers, teachers like Mrs. Richardson must think about how the classroom structure and format must be adjusted to meet the needs of such students. Mrs. Richardson implemented culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009) in regards to modifying individual classroom assignments and projects to suit the skills sets and interests of the students. She created assignments for the students that were about civil rights movements (including Chicano and Feminist activism), and she connected several topics to local knowledge and figures (like Gloria Anzaldua),

however she did all this within an unmodified classroom structure that emphasized an individual work ethic that not all students were responsive to, like Esperanza and several of the male students.

Another important finding is that while Ms. Richardson liked to connect the modules to students' interests, like Ms. Luna, she seldom talked about her own personal interests. One of the few ways that Mrs. Richardson showcased her personal interests and style was through the decorations and posters she hung in her room. As shown in a portrait above, one female student pointed out the Jimi Hendrix poster, and she asked Mrs. Richardson whether she was a fan of the musician. The encounter was brief, and Mrs. Richardson did not elaborate on her personal interest, but the student was satisfied with finding a common ground with the teacher. Like the students in Ms. Luna's class, Mrs. Richardson's students perceived her as caring and supportive even though she was impersonal much like Ms. Luna. However, upon my encouragement for Mrs. Richardson to share her own stories as a teen mother with her mothering students, she thought about the possibilities for how some personal disclosure could open up possibilities to connect with her students intimate ways. During the interview, Mrs. Richardson often stressed that she respected privacy, yet at the same time she was also deeply interested in the students' personal lives in order to help get through difficult obstacles, especially the teen mothers.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the last three chapters, I have presented three different classrooms at RGV School led by three different teachers who taught distinct courses with their own pedagogical styles and classroom structure. Each classroom was its own microcosm of dynamics between the teacher and the students, and each teacher's general approach imbued the classroom space to foster a particular set of reactions and behaviors from the students. For each chapter, I constructed portraits that show how each class took on a personality of its own. These portraits were shaped by my observations of the pedagogical interactions that took place in the classrooms, descriptions of each classroom layout and general appearance, as well as the interviews that were conducted with the three teachers I observed and the five mothering students who were in their classes during my field work.

In the fourth chapter, I presented portraits that featured Mrs. Santos' highly engaging and eclectic teaching style in her teen parenting class. Mrs. Santos acted like the conductor of a symphony taking center stage to orchestrate the rhythm, movement, and flow of the class. Like musicians, the mothering students followed Mrs. Santos' lead and participated in her class on her cue; each student contributed their own part to overall classroom productions that invoked feeling, expression, discussion, and the sharing of knowledge and ideas. Student voices and activity filled the space in Mrs. Santos' room, but it was always her stage-like presence that dominated the classroom dynamics. Students' comments, ideas, and questions were stirred through her sweeping performances and use of media and classroom props, and she often turned to dramatic

and grandiose effects to test her students' knowledge and to compel them to keep learning and thinking about the issues they spoke about in class. She also acted like a cheerleader, often motivating her students to "keep fighting" and to "stand up for themselves" because only they could ultimately fulfill their own needs and those of their child(ren). However, she also encouraged her students to learn how to ask for help and access resources, because she often emphasized that they can't "make it" on their own. They need the support of others to overcome the unique obstacles that face them as teen mothers.

In the fifth chapter, I showcased portraits that illustrate the high-energy and enthusiasm of Ms. Luna's students in her two science classes, Biology and 8th grade science. In the midst of overwhelming energy and the unstructured participation of the students, Ms. Luna takes on the role of the students' anchor. No matter how chaotic it may seem at times, Ms. Luna keeps the students at bay and anchors them in place as they compete with one another for her attention. Especially during whole group instruction, and especially in the 8th grade science class, the students take great pleasure in connecting with Ms. Luna by showing what they know, asking her silly or personal questions, mimicking her northern Mexican accent, and joking with her in order to get a smile from her or a chuckle. The students seemed to greatly enjoy being in the presence of Ms. Luna even though her presence was more on the sidelines than center stage. The overall flow and energy of the class was strongly led by the students, but Ms. Luna's gentle presence around her desk area was enough to corral their energy and attract their attention. Based on her accent, students speculated that Ms. Luna's first language was Spanish, so they

figured she must have lived on the other side of the U.S./Mexico border. These speculations indicated that there was something familiar about Ms. Luna that granted the students ease and comfort, reinforcing her role as their anchor and even a form of connection to home (since all students are of Mexican origin and may have had family in Mexico). The mothering students were especially drawn to her and felt comfortable to approach her for help, guidance, and even advice. Ms. Luna also acted like the students' secretary as she kept track of their work, grades, and progress in the class. She often called up students to her desk, where she spent much of her time during class, to monitor their assignments and projects and update them on any missing assignments. Comfort, familiarity, collective banter, side conversations, and the sharing of personal stories during individual work reigned in her class.

In the sixth chapter, the portraits covey the general workings and ambience of a classroom that was much like the central hub for students completing course credits in Speech, Theatre, or English (I, II, II, IV). Mrs. Richardson took on the role of air traffic control in her major airport hub where she directed the landing and takeoff of students coming in to work on individual modules. There was no whole group instruction, instead each student worked individually and at his or her own pace. As air traffic control, Mrs. Richardson also delegated the distribution of resources, materials, laptops, and iPads that students needed to complete their own work. She often sat in her rolling chair as she checked in on each student's progress and provided the individual guidance and instruction they needed to successfully complete their course credit. Like an airport hub, the activity of the students took center stage as they landed, settled in to complete their

work, then taking off once they were done. Student desks were organized in the center of the classroom with no clear distinction of where the front and the back of the room were located. Although this central hub was busy with students enrolled for different lengths of time, it was not a loud environment; instead it was quiet and subdued. Hence, Mrs. Richardson's classroom structure, layout, and format were not like a traditional classroom. This made it difficult for some mothering students to ground themselves and establish a sense of belonging in the classroom. As a result, some mothering students were hesitant to ask Mrs. Richardson for help because they thought she was too busy or confused to spend too much time with them. Other mothering students, however, were comfortable and at ease in the quiet classroom because they felt like they could establish control in the environment, which helped them focus on their work. Such students felt like they could easily approach Mrs. Richardson for support and even advice. Because instruction was highly individualized, teacher-student interactions were also individualized and personalized. Mrs. Richardson provided a range of options for students to complete their work in the manner they felt the most comfortable. Warmth, individuality, coziness, and personal taste were staple aspects of this classroom.

Although all three teachers and their classroom are distinct, in the next couple of sections I point overarching patterns to show how Mrs. Santos, Ms. Luna, and Mrs. Richardson were able to develop pedagogical practices and teaching philosophies that encompassed: (1) an embracement of a collective support system at RGV School for teachers and student; (2) the acceptance of their limitations in regards to their level of preparation in knowing how to handle and understand the complexity of students' lives;

(3) a process of overcoming their hesitation to disclose their own personal experiences in order to forge deeper connections with students; (4) extending their roles as teachers to become mentors or even extended family for their students.

THE COLLECTIVE "WE" DISCOURSE AND SCHOOL STRUCTURE

I distinctly remember a comment from one of the female students (non-mothering student) in Mrs. Richardson's 7th period class. At the end of class while the students waited for the bell to ring, seemingly out of nowhere, the student exclaimed loudly, "All the teachers that come [to RGV School] are all nice!" I looked up to find out whom she was talking to, only to find her focused on putting away her things and zipping up her backpack. She was talking to herself out loud like she was confirming a thought that passed by in her mind. I jotted down what she said and I chewed on it ever since to make sense of why she said that as a matter of fact. She pointed out that the teachers at RGV School are nice. Perhaps she sees them as supportive and caring and she was comparing them to teachers she had in the past, especially in the traditional school she attended before coming to RGV School. If that is the case, then what is it about the teachers at RGV School that makes them "nice" in comparison to other teachers in other schools? Another way to rephrase the question is: what is it about RGV School that *enables* teachers to be "nice" compared to what they would be like in another school, especially a traditional school? Is there something about the structure of the alternative school that fosters care and support from the teachers towards the students? Is there a collective mindset that teachers embrace as they try to meet the needs of their students?

The three teachers I worked with demonstrate that there is indeed a collective mindset at RGV School regarding care and support that enable them to think about mothering students, in particular, as worthy students who deserve quality education and the utmost respect from teachers. Throughout my interviews with Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Santos, and Ms. Luna they frequently emphasized "we" anytime they talked to me about their general approach to providing care and support to the students. For them, it was a collective effort to address the needs of the mothering students at RGV School. Anytime the three teacher I interviewed spoke about how they made sure each student felt valuable and worthy in their classes they also invoke "we" instead of "I", making it clear that they are not the only ones who are doing this kind of work. They also invoked "we" whenever they talked about the need to be flexible with deadlines and make sure they took the students' personal lives into account when they created assignments and decided the duration for certain lessons or modules. It became apparent that there were certain policies that were set in place at the school level, as well as discourses and rhetoric that may not have been policy driven, but rather, institutionalized through a family-like school culture that valued support and care as the precedents for then providing academic support.

This collective support structure was further illustrated in one of the portraits about Ms. Santos' class in chapter 4. In this portrait I discussed how the help of all the faculty and staff at the school was integral to helping her run the teen-parenting program. She made it clear that without the help of faculty and staff she would not be able to provide the care and support the mothering students need from her in order to navigate

the unique challenges they face a teen mothers. Hence, not only is there a rhetoric that teachers invoke to talk about how they collectively provide care and support for the students, but there is also an understanding that teachers need to care and support one another in order to be there for their students. This "family-like" understanding, as they called it, is not only clear between teachers, but it is also reinforced through administrative support that the teachers can count on to be there for their students. As I discussed in the portraits, teachers were free to walk in and out of their rooms during class time to directly access help and resources from the front office, school principal, and nurse. The principal was also highly visible and available throughout the school at all times of the day, and he regularly peeked in to classrooms to check in on students *and teachers*. It was common to hear the principal, Mr. Gallegos, give teachers reminders or quickly follow-up with teachers' questions or concerns. Open and consistent communication seemed like the norm rather than the exception in this small alternative school.

There seemed to be a general consensus that teachers were there to do their best to serve the needs of their students, and that their needs would also be addressed in return. This general consensus, collective mindset, and support structure were crucial for teachers to be able to meet the needs of mothering students. Without the support of one another and from the school, the teachers may not have seemed as "nice" to the student I encountered in Mrs. Richardson's classroom. It is critical that education practitioners and scholars note that a collective support network for teachers is crucial in order to best serve the needs of historically marginalized youth, including mothering students whose

personal and public lives are deeply intertwined through their identities of student and mother.

FEELING OVERWHELMED AND UNPREPARED

Although the teachers felt like they had support from one another and the school, and they worked from a collective effort to meet the needs of their students, there were still feelings of being overwhelmed and unprepared among the three teachers I worked with. More specifically, all three teachers took careful notice of students' personal matters and the complex social issues that imbue their everyday lives. Mrs. Santos, for instance, understood that teen dating violence is a harsh reality that many of her mothering students face, so she created lessons to address this issue that she witnessed first hand among several of her students. Mrs. Richardson also noticed that violence also came up in the stories of several of her female students, especially with her mothering students. She decided to follow up with some of the personal stories she had learned about from her students by pursing graduate research that looks further into how violence and control manifest in the lives of Latina youth, and consequently, how this impacts the students academically. She decided to create stories about what her female students shared in order to let their voiced be heard and combat the power dynamics and domination that they often encounter in their heterosexual relationships or within their families and communities. However, she found very little research on the matter and she felt lost about what direction to take with the topic. Similarly, Mrs. Santos also felt lost about how to approach the topic of teen violence in her classroom, so she looked for curriculum and other resources online from psychology based organizations in order to

approach the topic with her students. With worried expressions and exasperated tones, both teachers talked about how they felt unprepared in how to handle such sensitive topics in their students' lives, and they were not sure how to think about the complex and messy issues.

Ms. Luna, Mrs. Richardson, and Mrs. Santos all articulated their lack of preparation and lack of tools to make sense of what their students are going through. They voiced that they felt overwhelmed by the needs their students, and they also paid close attention to the complexity of their students' lives outside of school, especially the teen mothers who faced a unique set of responsibilities. This major finding across all three teachers raises several red flags about the shortcoming of teacher education programs. Further research needs to be conducted to investigate teachers' perceptions of what they know or don't know about sensitive topics in the lives of students. Future research can also look into what sort of tools teachers need in order to feel better prepared to support students who are going through complex situations in their personal lives.

SELF-DISCLOSURE AS PEDAGOGICAL METHOD

Although the teachers felt underprepared to address the messy and complex needs of their students, all three teachers were creative and resourceful in facing their weakness. Rather than denying their areas for improvement, they decided to utilize their own vulnerabilities to compensate for their limited knowledge of how to address sensitive topics with their students. More specifically, Ms. Luna, Mrs. Santos, and Mrs. Richardson utilized *self-disclosure* to: (1) forge connections with students, and (2)

address sensitive topics like violence that often comes up in the personal lives of students, including mothering students.

As shown in chapter 4 through the portrait about Mrs. Santos' teen dating violence lesson, after three years of thinking about how to approach the topic of teen dating violence in her class, Mrs. Santos decided to disclose her own story of abuse in a heterosexual relationship she had when she was a teenager. Mrs. Santos made it clear that the decision to tell her own personal story was a difficult because it took her three years to finally work up the courage to tell her own story. Mrs. Richardson she also grappled with the idea of disclosing her own story of being a teen mother, as well as other obstacles she faced in her lifetime. When I asked her whether she would be willing to share that she was also teen mother to her students, she confessed that she had thought about it and may decide to disclose some of her own personal stories with her students. In chapter 5, I discussed how Janet connected with Mrs. Richardson much more deeply that most of her other teachers because she learned about Mrs. Richardson's experiences as a mother. Even though Janet didn't know that Mrs. Richardson was also a teen mother, the fact that Mrs. Richardson is a mother at all was enough for Janet to feel like she had a mutual understanding with her teacher through the shared experience of being mothers. If Mrs. Richardson further embraces self-disclosure, deeper connections with several students could be forged, and it could also be a means to for her to approach sensitive topics with her students in a way that can help her compensate for her perceived lack of preparation with knowing how to talk about complex issues with her students. Mrs. Richardson already had a clear understanding that she had to learn about the personal

lives of her students in order to make sense of what is happening to them and why, in regards to violence, so establishing reciprocity and talking about herself a little more can help her with her endeavor much like it did with Mrs. Santos.

Through portraits of Ms. Luna in chapter 5, I also showed how personal self-disclosures does not have to revolve around complicated issues, it can also be about fun and pleasurable topics like music. One of the portraits in chapter 5 demonstrates how music became a central means for building community as the various kinds of Mexican-origin music enticed several students to share stories about their families and their communities. Even Ms. Luna chimed in and began to disclose her *Mexicaness* by sharing which songs were her favorite and which ones she has danced to in *bailes*. The students giggled as they heard her project *gritos* out loud in the classroom. She let her guard down and allowed her personal tastes and pleasures fill the room, forging connections with her students and allowing them to further create a sense of belonging in her classroom. These personal self-disclosures may seem small, but they made a big difference in creating a more welcoming and receptive classroom space for her students. She may feel unprepared to handle sensitive topics with her students, but disclosing her Mexicaness, in other words her Mexican cultural tastes and pleasure, is one way she approached her concern for finding ways to "motivate" her students.

EXTENDING THEIR ROLES AS TEACHERS TO BECOME MENTORS AND EXTENDED FAMILY

All three teachers understood their roles as teachers to encompass more than "teaching content" (A. Collins, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999), instead they also saw

themselves as mentors, advisors, resources, and even extended family members to the students. Ms. Luna especially made this clear when she told the students she loved them, and that they needed to take care of one another. Ms. Luna also invoked her role as a mentor in an interview I discussed in Chapter 5 making it clear that it is within her purview as a teacher to take students' personal lives into account when she plans for her class. Ms. Richardson also felt strongly about being there for the mothering students as they worked to continue their education. Although her attention was often diverted to students who were disengaged (mostly the young men in the class), she nonetheless provided the individual attention, support, and assistance the mothering students (who were usually focused in class) needed to be successful. The teachers' perspective of their roles as educators imbued their pedagogical interactions and relationships with their students in ways the promoted connection, and is reflective of othermothering practices of care (Auguste, 2011; A. Collins, 1998; López & Lechuga, 2007).

PEDAGOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS

As the teachers utilized pedagogical practices like self-disclosure, and as they learned about sensitive topics like teen dating violence, contradictions came about through their efforts. In order to learn about teen dating violence, violence in the lives of Latina women, and in the process of disclosing personal stories, the teachers had to pave their way through uncharted territory with unconventional teaching practices and educational resources that they had to access from psychology-based websites. For instance, Mrs. Santos looked through several websites with educational recourses based on research in psychology, social work, and counseling. Many of the materials that Mrs.

Santos used focused on teen dating violence as an individual problem, rather than socio-cultural issue rooted in patriarchy, discourses of masculinity, and gender power dynamics. During her lesson, Mrs. Santos invoked "machismo" to explain why men do not report abuse and harassment. Also, while the students watched the short film made by previous parenting students in which the men were being abused, the students giggled, indicating that they may not take abuse towards men as seriously as they do for women. Rather than troubling these conceptions about men and gender violence, these problematic reactions and the stereotype of machismo for Latino men in particular went unchecked. Also, the female protagonist that was killed in the film by her boyfriend was mostly talked about as "the victim," stripping her of any agency. On the other hand, the boyfriend was constructed as a "villain," even a monster who viciously killed his girlfriend to satisfy his individual quest for control and domination. The tools that Mrs. Santos had available were limited and exposed contradictions in Mrs. Santos' lesson in which women were portrayed as victims even though the teacher regularly pushed her mothering students to become empowered and speak up for themselves. Men's experience with abuse was also brought up, but then contradicted through the discourse of "machismo" through which Latino men especially are positioned as perpetrators, and the film itself made it seem like perpetrators are nothing less than monsters, completely dehumanizing young men's lives, experiences, and pressures. The victim/perpetrator binary is one that may not allow for (mainly) women to become fully empowered, and (mainly) men to become humanized and recognize their responsibilities and accountability for positive change.

For Mrs. Richardson, contradictions also emerged as she invoked Latina victimization and Latino perpetrators of violence as she talked about her Latina students, especially the mothering students. However, I want to point out that the teachers are not invoking individual blame on the teen mothers, like many teachers have been shown to do in other studies (Valencia, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999; Weiner, 2006). Instead, they are grappling with the reality their students face (male and female), however, they have a limited set of tools to make sense of what is happening and why. Mrs. Richardson specifically articulated that she has struggled to find helpful research in education that can help her understand what the Latina young women in her classes are going through in their communities and families. She did not directly invoke deficit frameworks about the surrounding Mexican-origin community as "the problem," such as "broken homes" or that the parents and the people in the community do not care about education (Valencia, 2002; Weiner, 2006). Instead she was grappling with power in regards to gender. However, her analysis fell short when she hit racialized gender tropes of victimhood and perpetrator as a dead end. I decided to share some Chicana feminist research literature to help her approach the matter from a different theoretical perspective, because I knew that she really wanted to understand the situation in a way that is helpful and not blaming the young women. However, it is also important for her to think about the messy reality of young Latinos men's lives in order to help her Latina students. This is an understanding that can also benefit Mrs. Santos.

These contradictions and limitations go beyond deficit frameworks (Valencia, 2002) as the sole reason teachers may not be able to fulfill the particular needs of

Latina/o youth. Like the teachers explained, they are working with very little resources and they feel like they were not prepared well enough in their teacher education program to think about these difficult topics in holistic ways. Reading between the lines (as well as listening to direct connections to their preparation) has enabled me to understand that these teachers are asking for perspectives that closely examines sensitive topics from a sociocultural lens that takes into account power dynamics, especially in regards to gender. Feminist perspectives and pedagogies (Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Biklen & Pollard, 2001; Elenes, Gonzalez, Bernal, & Villenas, 2001) and even queer theory and pedagogies (Kumashiro, 2001; Mayo, 2007; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008) can be helpful in their efforts. Hence, it is important to think about how theories of gender and sexuality in teacher education programs can be helpful for teachers to make sense of how gendered power dynamics play out in the lives of their students.

Contradictions fostered by schooling structure

The pedagogies of care and support that the teachers practice is made possible through the school culture in which the teachers and the students are embedded. RGV School revolves around a family-like structure that centers the importance of care and support for all students. Although there is a collective support structure at RGV School that provides teachers what they need in order to maintain their care work, the notion of family and community falls short when the school constructs care as "individualized attention" rather than community oriented practices of student affirmation. For instance, in chapter 6, I featured Kira in one of the portraits about Mrs. Richardson's class. In the portrait I showed how Kira separated herself from the rest of group in order to focus on

her work and not get distracted by other students who tend to socialize. Kira made it clear in an interview that she commonly separates herself from her peers because she is dedicated and on a mission to graduate, so socializing and getting along with other is not on her priority list. She explained that others may not be trying as hard as her to stay on track. It seemed that her commitment and isolation from her peers was actually perceived favorably by most of the teachers at RGV School. Indeed, every teacher I encountered thought highly of Kira and they admired her dedication and drive. The honor she was bestowed as "student of the month" solidified the school wide positioning of Kira a "great student." When I asked Kira what she thought about her new status as a "model student" at RGV School, Kira proclaimed that she was happy and proud of how the teachers viewed her at RGV School. However, she also admitted that she had trouble reconciling her new status as a "model student" with her peers, especially outside of RGV School. She often felt like her peers understood her to be bragging about her individual status in school.

Kira grappled with what it meant to be ahead of her peers and to be positioned as a "good" student, especially in light of her previous status as a "troublemaker." She liked that teachers were proud of her, but she worried about what her peers thought about her, even though she would often contradict herself to say that she does not care what others think about her. One day, however, I came across Mrs. Santos having a conversation with Kira that seemed full of tension. Kira had her head down as Mrs. Santos spoke in a stern voice that took on a more authoritative tone than usual. Mrs. Santos was upset that Kira skipped one of the teen parenting program meetings during school. Kira explained that

she skipped the meeting because she wanted to finish one of her modules to claim one of her credits, however Mrs. Santos exclaimed, "That is not excuse!" Mrs. Santos understood the importance of Kira finishing up her work to earn her credits, but then she also stressed the importance of fulfilling the requirements of the teen-parenting program, because she also needs support and community from her peers. She explained to Kira that she cannot do everything on her own and that there is a lot she can learn from her peers as well who are going through similar experiences as her. For Mrs. Santos, maintaining community and collective support is just as important as individual achievement. Mrs. Santos also understood that individual achievement is not sustainable.

Yet, in other classes, like Mrs. Richardson's class, in which individual preference and achievement is the norm, it was ok for Kira to physically separate herself from her group. Bourdieuian theory allowed me to not only see how each teacher has their own teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach, but also how each teacher's style may be supported by the RGV School structure in differential ways. This can send contradictory messages to students, as well as teachers. I wondered, if it was completely up to Mrs. Santos, would Kira be recognized as student of the month? In other words, what criteria was RGV School using to recognize students? Were they basing their decision on individual achievement, or working well with peers, or both? It seemed that Kira worked in isolation, so in regards to honoring students, RGV School held individual achievement in high regard. The students were being recognized for different reasons, but what this particular case shows is that there is an institutional contradiction in which individual achievement and collective support systems are both important, but sometimes one may

take more precedence than the other. It was interesting to me that the teachers recognized a collective effort in helping students, yet at the same time, many classes were structured as self-paced and module driven, while others were structured more like traditional classrooms with whole group instruction.

Esperanza points out how collective learning is important

In regards to the contradiction I point out in the previous section, Esperanza made clear how learning alongside her peers is integral to her overall feeling of support at RGV School. In Mrs. Richardson's class that was premised on individual achievement, Esperanza had difficulty fitting in and consequently asking for help. Esperanza explained that she learns well by sharing stories with others and forging a sense of belonging in the classroom. Connecting to her teachers at a personal level was also important to her because she not only needed academic, but also personal advice and life lessons. In fact, during the interview, Esperanza explained that she gained confidence from being able to interact with her teachers and her peers in meaningful ways. She explained that she was able to "mature" or grow and develop by learning with others. She even noted that she was proud of the student she had become at RGV School through the relationships she had established with teachers and peers. Her phrasing and positionality as "model student" was very different from Kira's process further pointing out institutional and pedagogical contradictions at RGV School.

What these reflections, perspectives, and insights from the mothering students show is that collective support structures, individualized and personalized attention, and clear interaction of care and support is essential for mothering students to continue their

education. However, although individualized instruction is critical for teen mothers to continue their education, too much isolation and over-determination (traits that often used to define "model students" according to U.S. Schooling norms) can also impede the development of support networks that is also crucial for a sustainable educational trajectory for teen mothers. As Mrs. Santos has stressed to her students, and as she practices in her own professional and personal life, it is important to learn how to access resources and find support in others in order to fulfill daunting responsibilities that are too much for one person.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

An important lesson to learn from this study for education researchers and practitioners (teacher educators) is to think about the context in which teachers are located, in order to understand how and why teachers use certain pedagogies and invoke particular discourses and forms of care. School structure, curricular pacing, time constraints, the complex needs of their students, and the inconsistency of student attendance in light of fast pacing are just some of the factors that play into why teachers adopt different strategies that may sometimes seem aesthetic, but could actually be a strategic means for addressing goals that come from an authentic "core" of care and concern from the teacher. Hence, it is useful to think about how teachers may posses a pedagogical core that encompasses authentic care, yet may not have the resources and time to engage in authentic expressions of care on a regular basis. This implication raises important questions: What are the structural and curricular changes that must take place for teachers to more effectively embrace their authentic caring core (or intent) in their

everyday classroom lives? For instance, for Ms. Luna, what did she need in order to freely express her genuine (and authentic) care to her students? Moreover, how would this freedom help her enjoy and relish her time with her students just as much as the students relished their interactions with her? For Mrs. Richardson, what did she need in order to feel comfortable with opening up to her students in more intimate and personal ways that could help her connect with mothering students like Esperanza?

In regards to gender, what resources do all three teachers need in order to think more critically about gender to disrupt gendered power dynamics in their classrooms? The implications of Mrs. Richardson's differential attention allocated along gendered lines, and Ms. Luna's informal labeling practices based on taken-for-granted assumptions about gender, sexuality, and age shows that is it is important for critical teaching practices to directly engage with disrupting power dynamics in the classroom related to these social identifiers, including gender and sexuality. This data demonstrates why teacher training programs need a critical understanding of gender, because the unique needs of students are not fully met until gender is understood and uncovered, starting with teacher biases. Thus, mothering students like Darlene call into question gender as an "organizing principle" as described by R.W. Connell (Connell, 1987, 2005). Gender is an organizing principle in that it regulates access to power, resources (in this case the teacher), and it also organizes relationships. This "organizing principle" can often become a teacher's interpretive lens, thereby limiting transformative expressions of care more closely aligned with an authentic caring core within the teacher.

Another major implication arising from this study is that teachers need support from their colleagues to achieve pedagogical interactions of care and support. However, it is essential to have school-driven mechanisms of support in place that will allow teachers to engage in self-care, and to take care of one another. At RGV School, the teachers understood that in order to meet the demanding needs of mothering students, they must take care of one another and themselves in order to be there for their students. Teacher training programs must emphasize that it is not a teacher's role alone that can impact students. Scholars have noted that teachers also need care and support in order to do the same for their students (Valenzuela, 1999). In order for teachers of all genders to become othermothers for their students and become part of the students' extended family and support system, teachers must also become othermothers for one another. And as Mrs. Santos noted in this study, teachers also need support and care from the school staff and administration. Hence, it is important to note that othermothering is not only important as a pedagogical practice among teachers; it is also a critical for schools to institutionalize othermothering practices of care for their teachers in order to meet the needs of their students.

The main findings I have outlined urges education practitioners and scholars to unpack what it means to re-conceptualize critical pedagogies and culturally relevant/responsive teaching in ways that recognizes the forms of care and support teachers need in order to do carry out transformative teaching practices. Moreover, the literature on the ethics of care pays great attention to what students need in order to feel cared for, however, more attention to how teachers can be supported via institutionalized

forms of care (and self-care) in schools is just as critical. Othermothering practices can be extended between teachers, in ways that goes beyond the sharing of lesson plans and classroom materials. Mrs. Santos pointed out how the school structure and culture play a vital role in how she was able to shape her network of support in particular ways. This finding serves as an example of what "educational contexts of support" (Berman et al., 2007) can look like for mothering students of Mexican-origin in an alternative school that welcomes collaboration among teachers and staff. Moreover, they show how attending the needs of mothering students invoke a collaborative team effort among educators. Thus, the educational experiences of teen mothers calls into question the hyper-individualized and isolating structure of traditional schools in which teachers are often held solely responsible for the students in their own classroom. In order for Mrs. Santos to be there for "her girls," she had to develop a teaching philosophy that involves teamwork at its core.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO LITERATURE ABOUT LATINA MOTHERING STUDENTS

As discussed in earlier chapters, little is known about the educational lives of Latina teen mothers because it is usually positioned as a social welfare issue rather than an educational concern. Scholars have long documented the negative outcomes associated with Latina teen pregnancy, including low educational attainment (Briggs, Brownell, & Roos, 2007; Checkland & Wong, 1999; Hoffman & Maynard, 2008; Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Belsky, & Silva, 2001; Jutte et al., 2010), however recent research has shown that (Latina) teen mothers undergo renewed interest in pursuing their education as a result of their early pregnancy (Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2008; Kelly, 2000; Pillow, 2004;

SmithBattle, 2007). This same research points out that in order for Latina teen mothers to maintain their renewed motivation and continue their education, the support and care from teachers is a critical component to teen mother's success in schools. While some studies have documented what kinds of support structures (Latina) mothering students need in order to navigate their dual identities as students and mothers (Berman, Silver, & Wilson, 2007; Byrd, 2007; Pillow, 2004; Stevens, 1988; Zachry, 2005), these same studies do not unpack precisely what sort of pedagogical interactions and relationships work well for Latina mothering students.

By engaging with pedagogies of care, othermothering, and culturally relevant teaching, I highlighted the kinds of relationships and interactions that are helpful for Latina mothering students as they seek to further their education for their child(ren) and their own individual progress. My findings show how it is not only possible to meet the needs of Latina teen mothers, but it is also possible for teachers to position them as "good" students by validating their roles as mothers. When teachers recognize the unique obstacles that Latina mothering students face, and recognize their resilience and motivation to overcome hardships as teen mothers, this creates a powerful source of support for teen mothers to see themselves as worthy of educational investment. Several of the teen mothers felt proud of themselves when their teachers positioned them as good students, alongside their identities as mothers. The teen mothers I interviewed shared that their self-esteem and self-image improved greatly ever since they transferred to RGV School and forged positive relationships with their teachers. Hence motherhood became a source of knowledge and experience that the teachers tapped into in order to create a

sense of belonging and community for Latina teen mothers in schools. For the Latina teen mothers in my study, they did not have to navigate a private/public divide by keeping their identities and realities as mothers apart from their responsibilities as students. At RGV School, the Latina teen mothers' personal and public selves were one and the same, each validated to construct a "good" student identity and positionality that supported the Latina teen mothers' self-renewal to finish high school and continue into higher education.

It is important to note, however, that the Latina teen mothers were evaluated by their teachers through a gendered interpretive lens that privileged traditional notions of femininity, like compliance and obedience (Bettie, 2000, 2014; Garcia, 2009, 2012; Hyams, 2000; Martin, 2002). For some teen mothers this worked in their favor as their gender performativity was approved, however for other teen mothers, like Darlene, these gendered codes of behavior were limiting. Motherhood itself is measured through traditional notions of femininity, so Latina teen mothers are especially expected to act in feminine ways that is socially sanctioned. While some literature has documented the gendered ways in which Latina women are often read by their teachers (Bettie, 2000, 2014; Garcia, 2009, 2012; Hyams, 2000; Martin, 2002), this study add further complexity to this literature by showing how motherhood is also part of the gendered and sexualized interpretive work that teachers can often conduct in their classrooms. Scholars have also noted how Latina teen mothers are hypersexualized and portrayed as hyperfertile in mainstream discourses (Chavez, 2013; Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Pillow, 2004). However, the classroom experiences of the mothering students in this study also

demonstrates that within a caring institution with supportive teachers, Latina teen mothers can also be positioned as "model" students if they uphold their roles as mother in socially sanctioned ways. The image of a Latina mothering student working hard to attain a better quality of life for her child was embraced by the teachers at RGV School in a way that constructed the Latina teen mothers as heroes who are not only worthy of and education, but also admiration. This is very different from how Latina teen mothers are often portrayed in traditional schools where they are commonly seen as a bad influence for other students (Pillow, 2004). Hence, this study sheds new light on what is known about the educational lives of teen mothers by taking into account context, schooling structure, teacher pedagogies, and locally constructed gendered norms.

SPEAKING BACK TO THEORY

As I have articulated in the previous section, motherhood is used in particular ways to reposition the mothering students as "good" students within an alternative school that values care and support. Drawing from Black feminist theory, Collins' (1991) questions whether alternative knowledge claims (in this case the experiences of teen mothers), via the standpoint of the subordinated (or Latina teen mothers), can actually challenge dominant paradigms (like mainstream schooling criteria of assessing student identities). In other words can the experiences and knowledge of Latina teen mothers somehow reconstruct what it means to be a "good student" in U.S. schooling—in this case an alternative school? This is a question that can be analyzed through Gender and Bourdieuian theory.

Connell's interpretation of gender theory posits that gender is an "organizing principal" in which the very existence of a masculine/feminine dichotomy organizes the possibilities for how individuals will act and navigate their social world. Bourdieu (2001) also recognizes gender in regards to social models of masculine domination, however he more closely unpacks how power structures are passed on through schemes of perception and evaluation that are masculinized. In other words, it is through dispositions, operating at a level below consciousness that people learn to evaluate the "opposite sex" and "themselves" through an androcentric lens (Collins, 1991; Connell, 2005; Smith, 1989). For instance, for Bourdieu (2001) taken-for-granted understandings of the gender-binary and the hierarchy assigned to it is solidified over time through people's practice. Bourdieu (1984, 1990, 2001) calls this symbolic dominance because people reify the order of things through the embodiment of their habitus (the way we learn to evaluate the world, and at the same time how others are evaluating the world). This not only creates schemes for perceiving the world, but also schemes for how people come to understand how other people perceive the world.

Building upon gender theory and Bourdieu's account of how masculine dominance works, it can be said that conventional ways of defining students as good, bad, or smart is a gendered process that reestablishes masculine ways of knowing and acting in the world. For instance, good students are often characterized by their ability to act as individuals and worry about their academic progress as they keep their private lives separate from their public endeavors in school. For mothering students or other students with significant responsibilities in their private lives, however, this institutionalized set of

logics actively judges those experiences in a negative way evidenced by the symbolic violence of stigmatizing and stereotyping teen mothers. Bourdieu (2001) also identifies women's care labor and interests as devalued in a patriarchal capitalist world. For mothering students, it takes a different type of educational structure to set a different evaluative practice in motion and be validated in the process.

The key here is that a *different* education structure is needed for evaluative practices to change, and in turn for symbolic dominance to be changed. Bourdieu (1984, 1990, 2001) claims that there has to be an interplay between structural change and change in practice. To change the structure is to change the conditions that enable the production of dispositions and pedagogical possibilities for teachers, so that the dominated and the dominant can share the same tools of evaluation (or teacher and students). Rather than have a distant authority, if students are working with the educators and together they decide what it means to be a good student, these co-constructed practices can then become an a new evaluative system that challenges the status quo. The only way the dominated get away from their dominated positions, is that they are able to work with those in positions in power to change the very logics that reproduces dispositions that reinforce oppressive hierarchies. Domination is when one group monopolizes systems of evaluations. For Bourdieu (1984, 1990, 2001) a structure can be changed when a previously dominated group can develop a common system of evaluation with the previously dominated group. This changes the symbolic structure so that new practices (pedagogies) can arise and new dispositions.

RGV School is an alternative educational structure that offers an opportunity to explore what it may look like when the lives and experiences of teen mothers are centered as a source of knowledge that changes the structural scheme of an educational space. I am not saying that RGV School is the model to follow in efforts to change mainstream schooling. There are many ways in which alternative schools also take up normative educational practices that may disadvantage students, and RGV School is no exception (for instance individual achievement is rewarded within the school rather than teamwork). What I am saying, however, is that this study speaks back to gender theory and Bourdieuian theory by showing how certain evaluative and pedagogical practices, within a caring alternative school, enabled Latina teen mothers to co-construct what it means to be a good student alongside their teachers. Through pedagogies of care and othermothering, the students were able to connect with their teachers in ways that granted them access to influence evaluative criteria for what makes a "model" student at RGV School. In contrast to how the identity making practices of Latina teen mothers were marginalized in their homeschools, the experiences and perceptions of mothering students informed the alternative educational space of RGV School. This theoretical implication presents an opportunity to make sense of real world possibilities for institutional change.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study focuses on the experiences of mothering students. However, future research must look into the experiences of fathering students as well. Education research about teen mothers is scarce, but literature regarding teen fathers is virtually absent. Mrs.

Santos and Mrs. Richardson also invoked that teen fathers are worthy of attention. However, they tended to highlight how boys tend to fall short in their parental responsibilities compared to their female counterparts. Stereotypes like machismo and perpetrators of violence came up for Latino men, so a study of masculinities at the intersection of teen fatherhood would be a valuable project to pursue for future research. Several of the mothering students also invoked a deep concern about addressing the educational needs of teen fathers. Many of them made it clear that more teen fathers must be enrolled in the teen-parenting program in order to learn the same skills that the teen mothers were learning in Mrs. Santos class, and to receive the same resources and services.

Moreover, this study was limited by the school being composed of a majority of Latina/o students of Mexican decent. The homogeneity of the school population (including faculty and staff) creates a different dynamic for the students than at a school where they would be a racial and/or economic minority. Studies of the experiences of Latina teen mothers must be conducted in a school setting where they may not share the same connections to their peers and teachers, and where they may experience particular marginalization due to being a racial/ethnic minority.

Similarly, this study is limited to the experiences of students who, for economic reasons, depend on public institutions much more than students of a middle or upper class background. Students with financial resources and students who have parents who can access other alternatives (such as home schooling) may have different experiences than

the students in this dissertation, as they may depend less on an alternative school structure and navigate their teenage pregnancy in a more private and individualized way.

Finally, future research should look at the lives of Latina mothering teens outside of school. Their interactions with other aspects of their community, such as religious institutions, medical institutions, and more, could complement their experiences at school. Moreover, a study that looked at the experiences of Latina mothering teens inside and outside of school simultaneously could identify key partnerships that could be fostered between different institutions, as well as lessons that could be learned in one institution and applied to another. This could include Latina mothering teens who work, and what types of support their employers provide (or not).

Appendix

Initial Codes	Focused Coding-Using theoretical lens	Themes-Level 1 Analysis	Themes-Level 2 Analysis
1. Student walking to teacher's desk for help 2. Yelling to teacher for help 3. Asking random questions out loud 4. Asking about current grade in class at teacher's desk 5. Approaching teacher to create a schedule to complete work 6. Student checking on missing work 7. Student following peer's example to ask about current grade in class 8. Yelling to teacher for current grade in class 9. Discreetly asking questions at teachers' desk 10. Asking questions unrelated to lesson out loud in class	*Codes (Young women):* 1. Student walking to teacher's desk for help on current work* 2. Asking about current grade in class at teacher's desk * 3. Approaching teacher to create a schedule to complete work 4. Student checking on missing work on a daily basis 5. Discreetly asking personal questions at teachers' desk *Denotes codes that overlap with young men, but were usually exhibited by young women	• Young women asking for help privately at teacher's desk • Young women discreetly communicate with teacher • A few young men behave similar to teen mothers	• Mothering students enacting appropriate femininity by asking for help privately • Some young women and mothering students work against "feminine" codes of behavior; reprimanded by teachers • Mothering students enacting appropriate femininity/good student behavior by organizing their work schedules
	Codes (Young men): 1. Yelling to teacher for help on current assignment* 2. Asking random questions out loud during lesson* 3. Student following female peer's example to ask about current grade in class	• Boys yelling at teacher for attention • Boys asking random questions to call attention • A few young women/teen mother behave similar to young men	• Teachers' unquestioned attention to young men based on 'boys will be boys' discourse as they demand attention for help • Boys take advantage of expectations of aggressive masculinity to get

	4. Yelling to teacher for current grade in class 5. Asking questions unrelated to lesson out loud in class* *Denotes codes that overlap with young women, but were usually exhibited by young men		help • Some boys exhibit "feminine" codes of behavior

References

Anzaldúa, G. (2007). Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, Third Edition (3rd ed.). Aunt Lute Books.

Aronson, J., Fried, C. B., & Good, C. (2002). Reducing the effects of stereotype threat on African American college students by shaping theories of intelligence. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 38(2), 113–125.

Auguste, M. (2011). The African-American Teacher as Othermother: 1863 to the present. In D.L. Byrd & Green, Fiona Joy (Eds.), Maternal Pedagogies In and Outside the Classroom (pp. 125–134). Toronto, Canada: Demeter Press.

Bailey, S., Burbidge, L., Campbell, P. B., Jackson, B., Marx, F., & McIntosh, P. (1992). The AAUW report: How schools shortchange girls. Washington, DC: AAUW Education Foundation.

Bakhtin, M. (1990) Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity. In M. Holquist, & V. Liapunov, (Eds.). Art and answerability: Early philosophical essays. University of Texas Press Slavic series, no. 9. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Beaman, R., Wheldall, K., & Kemp, C. (2006). Differential teacher attention to boys and girls in the classroom. *Educational Review*, *58*(3), 339–366.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (2002). A Womanist Experience of Caring: Understanding the Pedagogy of Exemplary Black Women Teachers. *The Urban Review*, *34*(1), 71–86.

Berman, R. C., Silver, S., & Wilson, S. (2007). "Don't Look Down on Me Because I Have One": Young Mothers Empowered in a Context of Support. *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, *9*(1), 42–52.

Bernal, D. D., Elenes, C. A., Godinez, F. E., & Villenas, S. (Eds.). (2006). *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy And Epistemology*. State University of New York Press.

Bettie, J. (2000). Women without class: Chicas, cholas, trash, and the presence/absence of class Identity. *Signs*, *26*(1), 1–35.

Bettie, J. (2014). *Women without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity*. Oakland, California: Univ of California Press.

Biklen, S. K., & Pollard, D. (2001). Feminist perspectives on gender in classrooms. *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, *4*, 723–748.

Bondy, E., & Ross, D. D. (2008). The teacher as warm demander. *Educational Leadership*,*66*(1), 54–58.

Bondy, E., Ross, D. D., Hambacher, E., & Acosta, M. (2013). Becoming Warm Demanders Perspectives and Practices of First Year Teachers. *Urban Education*, *48*(3), 420–450.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine Domination*. Stanford University Press.

Briggs, G., Brownell, M., & Roos, N. (2007). Teen Mothers and Socioecomic Status: The Chicken-Egg Debate. *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, *9*(1), 62–74.

Brouwers, A., & Tomic, W. (2000). A longitudinal study of teacher burnout and perceived self efficacy in classroom management. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *16*(2), 239–253.

Brown, K. D., & Brown, A. L. (2010). Silenced memories: An examination of the sociocultural knowledge on race and racial violence in official school curriculum. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *43*(2), 139–154.

Brubaker, S. J., & Wright, C. (2006). Identity Transformation and Family Caregiving: Narratives of African American Teen Mothers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *68*(5), 1214–1228.

Bryant, A. L. (1993). Hostile hallways: The AAUW survey on sexual harassment in America's schools. *Journal of School Health*, *63*(8), 355–357.

Burdell, P. (1995). Chapter 4: Teen Mothers in High School: Tracking Their Curriculum. *Review of Research in Education*, *21*(1), 163–208.

Burdell, P. (1998). Young Mothers as High School Students. *Education and Urban Society*, *30*(2), 207–223.

Burke, R. J., Greenglass, E. R., & Schwarzer, R. (1996). Predicting teacher burnout over time: Effects of work stress, social support, and self-doubts on burnout and its consequences. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping*, *9*(3), 261–275.

Burnett, J. (2015). Matamoros Becomes Ground Zero As Drug War Shifts On Mexican Border. Retrieved April 1, 2016, from http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/04/01/396581287/matamoros-becomesground-zero-as-drug-war-shifts-on-mexican-border

Byrd, D. L. (2007). If You Build It, They May Not be Able to Get There: The Challenges of Mentoring Teenaged and Low-Income Single Mothers Through an Undergraduate Service-Learning Course. *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, *9*(1), 111–124.

Byrd, D. L. (2011). Mothering Student Activists: Reflections on Maternal/Feminist Service Learning Pedagogy. In Green, Fiona Joy & Byrd, Deborah Lea (Eds.), *Maternal Pedagogies In and Outside the Classroom* (pp. 135–156). Toronto, Canada: Demeter Press.

Chapman, T. K. (2007). Interrogating classroom relationships and events: Using portraiture and critical race theory in education research. *Educational Researcher*, *36*(3), 156–162.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. SAGE Publications.

Chavez, L. (2013). *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation, Second Edition*. Stanford University Press.

Checkland, D., & Wong, J. (1999). *Teen pregnancy and parenting: social and ethical issues*. Univ of Toronto Pr.

Chodorow, N. J. (1999). *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender, Updated Edition*. University of California Press.

Collins, A. (1998). Mothers as Teachers-Teachers as Mothers. In S. M. Abbey & A. O'Reilly (Eds.), *Redefining Motherhood: Changing the Identities and Patterns* (pp. 92–102). Sumach Press.

Collins, J. L., & Mayer, V. (2010). *Both Hands Tied: Welfare Reform and the Race to the Bottom in the Low-Wage Labor Market*. University Of Chicago Press.

Collins, P. H. (1991). *Black Feminist Thought : knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.

Connell, R. (1987). *Gender and power: society, the person and sexual politics*. Cambridge, UK: Polity in association with B. Blackwell.

Connell, R. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.

Courtney, M., & Noblit, G. W. (1994). The Principal as Caregiver. In A. R. Prillaman, D. J. Eaker, & D. M. Kendrick (Eds.), *The Tapestry of Caring: Education as Nurturance* (pp. 67–85). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Danin, S. T. (1994). Contradictions and Conflicts in Caring. In A. R. Prillaman, D. J. Eaker, & D. M. Kendrick (Eds.), *The Tapestry of Caring: Education as Nurturance* (pp. 51–66). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Davies, J. (2003). Expressions of gender: an analysis of pupils' gendered discourse styles in small group classroom discussions. *Discourse & Society*, *14*(2), 115–132.

Dearden, K., Hale, C., & Alvarez, J. (1992). The Educational Antecedents of Teen Fatherhood. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *62*(1), 139–147.

Delgado Bernal, D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *8*(1), 105–126.

Dempsey, V. (1994). Context, Relationships, and Shared Experiences: The Construction of Teachers' Knowledge. In A. R. Prillaman, D. J. Eaker, & D. M. Kendrick (Eds.), *The Tapestry of Caring: Education as Nurturance* (pp. 89–107). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Dietrich, L. C. (1998). *Chicana Adolescents: Bitches, "ho's, and Schoolgirls*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Dixson, A. D. (2005). Extending the metaphor: Notions of jazz in portraiture. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *11*(1), 106–137.

Dixson, A. D., Chapman, T. K., & Hill, D. A. (2005). Research as an aesthetic process: Extending the portraiture methodology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *11*(1), 16–26.

Edwards, A. E. (2003). Mothering the Mind: Women of Colour Creating Supportive Communities to Increase the Academic Success Rate of Minority Students. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, *5*(2).

Elenes, C. A., Gonzalez, F. E., Bernal, D. D., & Villenas, S. (2001). Introduction: Chicana/Mexicana feminist pedagogies: Consejos, respeto, y educacion in

everyday life. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *14*(5), 595–602.

English, F. W. (2000). A critical appraisal of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's portraiture as a method of educational research. *Educational Researcher*, *29*(7), 21–26.

Espinoza, R. (2010). The good daughter dilemma: Latinas managing family and school demands. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *9*(4), 317–330.

Farber, B. A. (1991). *Crisis in education: Stress and burnout in the American teacher*. Jossey Bass.

Ferguson, A. A. (2001). *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity* (Reprint edition). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Fields, J. (2008). *Risky Lessons: Sex Education and Social Inequality*. Rutgers University Press.

Fine, M., & Zane, N. (1991). Bein'wrapped too tight: When low-income women drop out of high school. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *19*(1/2), 77–99.

Fine, M., Roberts, R., & Weis, L. (2000). Refusing the betrayal: Latinas redefining gender, sexuality, culture and resistance. *The Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies*, *22*(2), 87–119.

Furstenberg, F. F. (1987). *Adolescent Mothers in Later Life*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Garcia, L. (2009). "Now why do you want to know about that?" Heteronormativity, sexism, and racism in the sexual (mis) education of Latina youth. *Gender & Society*, *23*(4), 520–541.

Garcia, L. (2012). *Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself: Latina Girls and Sexual Identity*. NYU Press.

Garrahy, D. A. (2003). Speaking Louder than Words: Teachers' Gender Beliefs and Practices in Third Grade Classrooms. *Equity &Excellence in Education*, *36*(1), 96–104.

Gavey, N. (2013). *Just sex?: The cultural scaffolding of rape*. London: Routledge.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *JOURNAL OF TEACHER EDUCATION-WASHINGTON DC-*, *53*(2), 106–116.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.

Gay, G., & Kirkland, K. (2003). Developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in preservice teacher education. *Theory into Practice*, *42*(3), 181–187.

Gilligan, C. (1993). *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (29th printing). Harvard University Press.

Glikman, H. (2004). Low-income young fathers: contexts, connections, and self. *Social Work*, *49*(2), 195–206.

Gonzalez-Lopez, G. (2006). Epistemologies of the wound: Anzalduan theories and sociological research on incest in Mexican society. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, *4*, 17–24.

Griffith, A. I., & Smith, D. E. (2007). *Mothering for Schooling* (1st ed.). Taylor & Francis. Hancock, A.-M. (2003). Contemporary Welfare Reform and the Public Identity of the" Welfare Queen." *Race, Gender & Class*, 31–59.

Gutiérrez, E. R. (2008). *Fertile Matters: The Politics of Mexican-Origin Women's Reproduction*. University of Texas Press.

Gutierrez, K., Rymes, B., & Larson, J. (1995). Script, counterscript, and underlife in the classroom: James Brown versus Brown v. Board of Education. *Harvard Educational Review*, *65*(3), 445–472.

Gutierrez, K., Rymes, B., & Larson, J. (1995). Script, counterscript, and underlife in the classroom: James Brown versus Brown v. Board of Education. *Harvard Educational Review*, *65*(3), 445–472.

Hancock, A. M. (2003). Contemporary Welfare Reform and the Public Identity of the" Welfare Queen." *Race, Gender & Class*, 31–59.

Harding, H. A. (2005). "City Girl": A Portrait of a Successful White Urban Teacher. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *11*(1), 52–80.

Harding, S. (Ed.). (1988). *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues* (Readers Notes). Indiana University Press.

Harris-Perry, M. V. (2011). *Sister citizen: Shame, stereotypes, and Black women in America*. Yale University Press.

Hatt, B. (2012). Smartness as a Cultural Practice in Schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, *49*(3), 438–460.

Hesse-Biber, S. J. N., & Leavy, P. L. (Lina) (Eds.). (2006). *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Hill, D. A. (2005). The Poetry in Portraiture: Seeing Subjects, Hearing Voices, and Feeling Contexts. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *11*(1), 95–105.

Hirsch, M. (1996). Maternity and Rememory: Toni Morrison's Beloved. In D. Bassin, M. Honey, & M. M. Kaplan (Eds.), *Representations of Motherhood* (pp. 92–110). Yale University Press.

Hochschild, A., & Machung, A. (2012). *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. Penguin.

Hoffman, S. D., & Maynard, R. A. (2008). *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs & Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*. The Urban Insitute.

hooks, bell. (1984). Revolutionary Parenting. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (pp. 133–146). South End Press.

hooks, bell. (2000). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2nd ed.). South End Press.

Hurtado, A. (1997). The Politics of Sexuality in the Gender Subordination of Chicanas. In C. Trujillo (Ed.), *Living Chicana Theory* (pp. 383–428). Third Women Pr.

Hurtado, A. (2003). *Voicing Chicana Feminisms: Young Women Speak Out on Sexuality and Identity*. NYU Press.

Hurtado, A., Haney, C. W., & Hurtado, J. G. (2012). "Where the boys are": Macro and micro considerations for the study of young Latino men's educational achievement. In P. Noguera, A. Hurtado, & E. Fergus (Eds.), *Invisible No More: Understanding the Disenfranchisement of Latino Men and Boys* (pp. 101–121). Routledge.

Hyams, M. S. (2000). " Pay attention in class...[and] don't get pregnant": a discourse of academic success among adolescent Latinas. *Environment and Planning A*, *32*(4), 635 654.

Irvine, J. J., & Fraser, J. W. (1998). Warm demanders. *Education Week*, *17*(35), 56–57.

Jackson, P. W. (1968). *Life in Classrooms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Jaffee, S., Caspi, A., Moffitt, T. E., Belsky, J. A. Y., & Silva, P. (2001). Why are children born to teen mothers at risk for adverse outcomes in young adulthood? Results from a 20-year longitudinal study. *Development and Psychopathology*, *13*(2), 377–397.

Johnson, L. R. (2009). Challenging "Best Practices" in Family Literacy and Parent Education Programs: The Development and Enactment of Mothering Knowledge among Puerto Rican and Latina Mothers in Chicago. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *40*(3), 257-276.

Jutte, D. P., Roos, N. P., Brownell, M. D., Briggs, G., MacWilliam, L., & Roos, L. L. (2010). The ripples of adolescent motherhood: social, educational, and medical outcomes for children of teen and prior teen mothers. *Academic Pediatrics*, *10*(5), 293–301.

Kalil, A., & Ziol-Guest, K. M. (2008). Teacher Support, School Goal Structures, and Teenage Mothers' School Engagement. *Youth & Society*, *39*(4), 524–548.

Kaplan, E. B. (1996). Black teenage mothers and their mothers: the impact of adolescent childbearing on daughters' relations with mothers. *Social Problems*, 427–443.

Kaplan, E. B. (1997). *Not Our Kind of Girl: Unravelling the Myths of Black Teenage Motherhood* (1st ed.). University of California Press.

Kelly, D. M. (1996). Stigma Stories Four Discourses About Teen Mothers, Welfare, and Poverty. *Youth & Society*, *27*(4), 421–449.

Kelly, D. M. (1998). Teacher Discourses about a Young Parents Program: The Many Meanings of " Good Choices." *Education and Urban Society*, *30*(2), 224–41.

Kelly, D. M. (2000). *Pregnant with Meaning: Teen Mothers and the Politics of Inclusive Schooling*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Kelly, D. M. (2003). Practicing Democracy in the Margins of School: The Teenage Parents Program as Feminist Counterpublic. *American Educational Research Journal*, *40*(1), 123–146.

Kelly, D. M. (2007). Young Mothers, Agency and Collective Action: Issues and Challenges. *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, *9*(1), 9–19.

Kirkman, M., Harrison, L., Hillier, L., & Pyett, P. (2001). "I know I'm doing a good job': canonical and autobiographical narratives of teenage mothers. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *3*(3), 279–294.

Klaw, E. L., & Rhodes, J. E. (1995). Mentor relationships and the career development of pregnant and parenting African-American teenagers. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *19*(4), 551–562.

Kleinfeld, J. (1975). Effective teachers of Eskimo and Indian students. *The School Review*, *83*(2), 301–344.

Kumashiro, K. K. (Ed.). (2001). *Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality: Queer Students of Color and Anti-Oppressive Education (Curriculum, Cultures, and*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Kyriacou, C. (1987). Teacher stress and burnout: An international review. *Educational Research*, *29*(2), 146–152.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, *32*(3), 465–491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *11*(1), 7–24.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1983). *The good high school: Portraits of character and culture*. Basic Books (AZ).

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1994). *I've known rivers: Lives of loss and liberation*. Addison-Wesley Pub.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The Art and Science of Portraiture*. Jossey-Bass. Luker, K. (1996). *Dubious conceptions: the politics of teenage pregnancy*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Leadbeater, B. J. R., & Way, N. (Eds.). (2007). *Urban Girls Revisited: Building Strengths*. New York: New York University Press.

Leahy, T. (1994). Taking up a position: Discourses of femininity and adolescence in the context of man/girl relationships. *Gender & Society*, *8*(1), 48–72.

López, N., & Lechuga, C. E. (2007). "They Are Like a Friend": Othermothers creating empowering school-based community living rooms in Latina and Latino middle schools. In B. J. Ross Leadbetter & N. Way (Eds.), *Urban Girls Revisited: Building Strengths* (pp. 97–120).

Malagon, M. (2010). Trenches Under The Pipeline: The Educational Trajectories of Chicano Male Continuation High School Students. Retrieved from http://escholarship.org/uc/item/73q6f2fx.pdf

Mann, E. S. (2013). Regulating Latina Youth Sexualities through Community Health Centers Discourses and Practices of Sexual Citizenship. *Gender & Society*,

Martin, J. A., Hamilton, B. E., Sutton, P. D., Ventura, S. J., Menacker, F., Kermeyer, S. & Mathews, T. J. (2009). *Births: Final data for 2006* (National Vital Statistics Reports No. 57(7). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

Martin, K. A. (2002). I couldn't ever picture myself having sex…': Gender differences in sex and sexual subjectivity. *Gender Sexuality*, 142–166.

Matamoros shootings leave dozens dead. (2010). *Brownsville Herald*. Brownsville, TX. Retrieved from http://www.brownsvilleherald.com/article_23fd6608-6b71-59a3-bd50f7def20be20e.html

Mayo, C. (2007). Chapter 3 Queering Foundations: Queer and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Educational Research. *Review of Research in Education*, *31*(1), 78–94.

McLoyd, V. C., Jayaratne, T. E., Ceballo, R., & Borquez, J. (1994). Unemployment and Work Interruption among African American Single Mothers: Effects on Parenting and Adolescent Socioemotional Functioning. *Child Development*, *65*(2), 562–589.

Medina, L. (2010). Nepantla spirituality: Negotiating fluid identities, faiths, and practices. In N. E. Cantú, C. L. Gutiérrez, N. Alarcón, & R. E. Urquijo-Ruiz (Eds.), *El Mundo Zurdo: Selected Works from the Meetings of the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldua, 2007 and 2009* (pp. 205–214). Aunt Lute Books.

Menchú, R., & Burgos-Debray, E. (1984). I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian woman in Guatemala. London: Verso.

Méndez-Negrete, J. (2006). *Las hijas de Juan: Daughters Betrayed* (Revised). Duke University Press Books.

Mendez-Negrete, J., Saldana, L. P., & Vega, A. (2006). "Can a culturally informed after-school curriculum make a difference in teen pregnancy prevention? Preliminary evidence in the case of San Antonio's Escuelitas.," *87*(1), 95–104.

Merriam, S. B. (Ed.). (2002). *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Mier, N., Flores, I., Robinson, J. R., & Millard, A. V. (2004). Cultural, demographic, educational, and economic characteristics. *Nourishing the Future: The Case for Community-Based Nutrition Research in the Lower Rio Grande Valley*. *Houston (TX): The University of Texas School of Public Health at Houston*, 15–24.

Moraga, C., & Anzaldua, G. (Eds.). (1983). *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (2nd ed.). Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press.

Munoz, J. S. (2004). The social construction of alternative education: Re-examining the margins of public education for at-risk Chicano/a students. *The High School Journal*, *88*(2), 3–22.

Nelsen, A. (2015). Civic life struggles in shadow of Matamoros violence. *San Antonio Express News*. San Antonio, TX. Retrieved from http://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Civic-life-struggles-in-shadow-ofMatamoros-6603163.php

Newton, R. M. (2005). Learning to Teach in the Shadows of 9/11: A Portrait of Two Arab American Preservice Teachers. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *11*(1), 81–94.

Noddings, N. (1990). Feminist Critiques in the Professions. *Review of Research in Education*, *16*, 393–424.

Noddings, N. (2001). The caring teacher. In V. Richardson & American Educational Research Association (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (4th ed, pp. 99–105). Washington, D.C: American Educational Research Association.

Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Univ of California Press.

Noguera, P. A., & Hurtado, A. (2012). Invisible no more: The status and experience of Latino males from multidiscplinary perspectives. In P. Noguera, A. Hurtado, & E. Fergus (Eds.), *Invisible No More: Understanding the Disenfranchisement of Latino Men and Boys* (pp.1–15). Routledge.

O'Reilly, A. (2004). *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*. State University of New York Press.

Ochoa, G. L. (2011). Transformational Caring: Mexican American Women Redefining Mothering and Education. In D. Smith Silva (Ed.), *Latina/Chicana Mothering* (pp. 104-121). Toronto, Canada: Demeter Press.

Orange, T. (2013). Inside Voices: A look at Culturally Responsive Pedagogy through the lens of students. *X-Change Publications and Resources for Transforming Schools*.

Ortiz, I. (2009). Shooting in Matamoros. *Valley Morning Star*. Harlingen, TX. Retrieved from http://rre.sagepub.com/content/25/1/127

Parra-Cardona, J. R., Sharp, E. A., & Wampler, R. S. (2008). "Changing for My Kid": Fatherhood Experiences of Mexican-Origin Teen Fathers Involved in the Justice System. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *34*(3), 369–387.

Paschal, A. M., Lewis-Moss, R. K., & Hsiao, T. (2011). Perceived Fatherhood Roles and Parenting Behaviors Among African American Teen Fathers. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *26*(1), 61–83.

Pascoe, C. J. (2011). *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* (Second Edition, With a New Preface edition). Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Perez, E. (1998). Irigaray's female symbolic in the making of Chicana lesbian sitios y lenguas (sites and discourses). *Living Chicana Theory*, 87–101.

Pérez, E. (1999). *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. Indiana University Press.

Pérez, E. (2005). Gloria Anzaldúa: La gran nueva mestiza theorist, writer, activist-scholar. *NWSA Journal*, *17*(2), 1–10.

Phoenix, A. (1993). The Social Construction of Teengage Motherhood: A Black and White Issue? In A. Lawson & D. L. Rhode (Eds.), *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy* (pp. 74–97). New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Pillow, W. (2006). Teen Pregnancy and Education Politics of Knowledge, Research, and Practice. *Educational Policy*, *20*(1), 59–84.

Pillow, W. S. (2004). *Unfit Subjects*. Taylor & Francis.

Proweller, A. (2000). Re-Writing/-Righting Lives: Voices of Pregnant and Parenting Teeners in an Alternative School. In L. Weis & M. Fine (Eds.), *Construction Sites: Excavating Race, Class, and Gender Among Urban Youth* (pp. 100–120). Teachers College Press.

Raywid, M. A. (1993). Community: An alternative School Accomplishment. In G. A. Smith (Ed.), *Public Schools That Work: Creating Community* (1st ed., pp. 23–44). Routledge.

Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press, USA.

Reuman, A. E., & Anzaldúa, G. E. (2000). Coming into play: an interview with Gloria Anzaldua. *Melus*, 3–45.

Rhodes, J. E., Ebert, L., & Fischer, K. (1992). Natural mentors: An overlooked resource in the social networks of young, African American mothers. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *20*(4), 445–461.

Robinson, K. H., & Ferfolja, T. (2008). Playing it up, playing it down, playing it safe: Queering teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *24*(4), 846–858.

Rock, L. (2007). The "Good Mother" vs. the "Other" Mother: The Girl Mom. *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, *9*(1), 20–28.

Rogers, D. L. (1994). Conceptions of Caring in a Fourth Grade Classroom. In A. R. Prillaman, D. J. Eaker, & D. M. Kendrick (Eds.), *The Tapestry of Caring: Education as Nurturance* (pp. 33–47). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Romo, H. D. (1998). *Latina High School Leaving: Some Practical Solutions*. *ERIC Digest*. Charleston, WV: Eric Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1986). Sexism in the classroom: From grade school to graduate school. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, *67*(7), 512–515.

Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1995). *Failing at fairness: How our schools cheat girls*. New York, NY: Touchstone.

Sadker, M., Sadker, D., & Klein, S. (1991). Chapter 7: The Issue of Gender in Elementary and Secondary Education. *Review of Research in Education*, *17*(1), 269–334.

Sadker, M., Sadker, D., & Steindam, S. (1989). Gender equity and educational reform. *Educational Leadership*, *46*(6), 44–47.

Sandoval, C. (2000). *Methodology of the Oppressed*. U of Minnesota Press.

Santiago, E. (1998). Almost a woman. Reading, Mass: Perseus Books.

Schwab, R. L., & Iwanicki, E. F. (1982). Perceived role conflict, role ambiguity, and teacher burnout. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *18*(1), 60–74.

Sidel, R. (2006). *Unsung Heroines: Single Mothers and the American Dream* (1st ed.). University of California Press.

Simms, M. C. (1993). Adolescent Pregnancy among Blacks in the United States: Why is it a Policy Issue? In A. Lawson & D. L. Rhode (Eds.), *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy* (pp. 241–256). New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Smith Silva, D. (Ed.). (2011). *Latina/Chicana Mothering*. Toronto, Canada: Demeter Press.

Swidler, A. (2013). *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*. University of Chicago Press.

Smith, D. E. (1989). *The Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Northeastern. Stevens, J. H. (1988). Social Support, Locus of Control, and Parenting in Three Low Income Groups of Mothers: Black Teenagers, Black Adults, and White Adults. *Child Development*, *59*(3), 635–642.

Smith, G. A. (Ed.). (1993). *Public Schools That Work: Creating Community* (1st ed.). Routledge.

SmithBattle, L. (2007). "I Wanna Have a Good Future": Teen Mothers' Rise in Educational Aspirations, Competing Demands, and Limited School Support. *Youth & Society*, *38*(3), 348–371.

Solorzano, D. G., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through a critical race and LatCrit theory framework Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban Education*, *36*(3), 308–342.

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *8*(1), 23–44. Thornberry, T. P., Smith, C. A., & Howard, G. J. (1997). Risk Factors for Teenage Fatherhood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *59*(3), 505–522.

Spivak, G. C. 1988." Can the Subaltern Speak?". Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. C. Nelson and AL Grossberg, 271-313.

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*(5), 797.

Stevens, J. H. (1988). Social Support, Locus of Control, and Parenting in Three Low-Income Groups of Mothers: Black Teenagers, Black Adults, and White Adults. *Child Development*, *59*(3), 635–642.

Thirteen Mexicans killed in gun battles in Matamoros. (2013). Retrieved April 1, 2016, from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-24803143

Thornberry, T. P., Smith, C. A., & Howard, G. J. (1997). Risk Factors for Teenage Fatherhood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *59*(3), 505–522.

Tolman, D. L. (2009). *Dilemmas of desire: Teenage girls talk about sexuality*. Harvard University Press.

Tolman, D. L., Striepe, M. I., & Harmon, T. (2003). Gender matters: Constructing a model of adolescent sexual health. *Journal of Sex Research*, *40*(1), 4–12.

Torres, M., & Fergus, E. (2012). Social mobility and the complex status of Latino males: Education, employment, and incarceration patterns from 2000-2009. In P. Noguera, A. Hurtado, & E. Fergus (Eds.), *Invisible No More: Understanding the Disenfranchisement of Latino Men and Boys* (pp. 19–40). Routledge.

Trejos-Castillo, E., & Frederick, H. (2011). Latina Teenage Mothering: Meanings, Challenges and Successes. In D. Smith Silva (Ed.), *Latina/Chicana Mothering* (pp. 125–140). Toronto, Canada: Demeter Press.

Trinidad Galvan, R. (2006). Campesina Epistemologies and Pedagogies of the Spirit: Examining Women's Sobrevivencia. In D. D. Bernal, C. A. Elenes, F. E. Godinez, & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy And Epistemology*. 161-179: State University of New York Press.

Urrieta, L. (2009). *Working from Within: Chicana and Chicano Activist Educators in Whitestream Schools*. University of Arizona Press.

Valencia, R. R. (2002). " Mexican Americans Don't Value Education!" On the Basis of the Myth, Mythmaking, and Debunking. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *1*(2), 81–103.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive Schooling: U.S. Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*. State University of New York Press.

Vasquez, J. A. (1988). Contexts of learning for minority students. In *The Educational Forum* (Vol. 52, pp. 243–253). Taylor & Francis.

Villegas, S. (1974). Chile, el Estadio: Los crímenes de la Junta Militar. Buenos Aires: Editorial Cartago.

Villenas, S. A. (2005). Commentary: Latina Literacies in Convivencia. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *36*(3), 273–277. http://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2005.36.3.273

Villenas, S., & Deyhle, D. (1999). Critical Race Theory and Ethnographies Challenging the Stereotypes: Latino Families, Schooling, Resilience and Resistance. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *29*(4), 413–445.

Villenas, S., & Moreno, M. (2001). To valerse por si misma between race, capitalism, and patriarchy: Latina mother-daughter pedagogies in North Carolina. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *14*(5), 671–687.

Vogt, F. (2002). A Caring Teacher: Explorations into primary school teachers' professional identity and ethic of care. *Gender and Education*, *14*(3), 251–264.

Wald, J., & Losen, D. J. (2003). Defining and redirecting a school-to-prison pipeline. *New Directions for Youth Development*, *2003*(99), 9–15.

Ware, F. (2006). Warm demander pedagogy culturally responsive teaching that supports a culture of achievement for African American students. *Urban Education*, *41*(4), 427–456.

Wehlage, G. G., Rutter, R. A., Smith, G. A., Lesko, N., & Fernandez, R. R. (1989). *Reducing the Risk: Schools as Communities of Support* (1st ed.). Falmer Press.

Weiner, L. (2006). Challenging deficit thinking. *Educational Leadership*, *64*(1), 42.

Weis, L. (2000). *Construction Sites: Excavating Race, Class, and Gender Among Urban Youth*. (L. Weis & M. Fine, Eds.). Teachers College Press.

Wells, M. (2013). Mexico-US Border Shootouts: Surge of Zetas-Gulf Battle? Retrieved April 1, 2016, from http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/shootouts-in-mexican-border-citykill-13

Wilkinson, D. L., Magora, A., Garcia, M., & Khurana, A. (2009). Fathering at the Margins of Society Reflections From Young, Minority, Crime-Involved Fathers. *Journal of Family Issues*, *30*(7), 945–967.

Wright, P. A., & Davis, A. A. (2008). Adolescent Parenthood Through Educators' Eyes Perceptions of Worries and Provision of Support. *Urban Education*, *43*(6), 671–695.

Wright, T. (2010). Learning to Laugh: A Portrait of Risk and Resilience in Early Childhood. *Harvard Educational Review*, *80*(4), 444–464.

Xie, H., Cairns, B. D., & Cairns, R. B. (2001). Predicting Teen Motherhood and Teen Fatherhood: Individual Characteristics and Peer Affiliations. *Social Development*, *10*(4), 488–511.

Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race media literacy: Challenging deficit discourse about Chicanas/os. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *30*(1), 52–62.

Yosso, T. J. (2002a). Critical race media literacy: Challenging deficit discourse about Chicanas/os. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *30*(1), 52–62.

Yosso, T. J. (2002b). Toward a critical race curriculum. *Equity &Excellence in Education*, *35*(2), 93–107.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69–91.

Yosso, T. J., Smith, W. A., Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. G. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. *Harvard Educational Review*, *79*(4), 659–691.

Young, E. (2010). Challenges to Conceptualizing and Actualizing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: How Viable Is the Theory in Classroom Practice? *Journal of Teacher Education*, *61*(3), 248–260.

Zachry, E. M. (2005). Getting My Education: Teen Mothers' Experiences in School Before and After Motherhood. *Teachers College Record*, *107*(12), 2566–2598.